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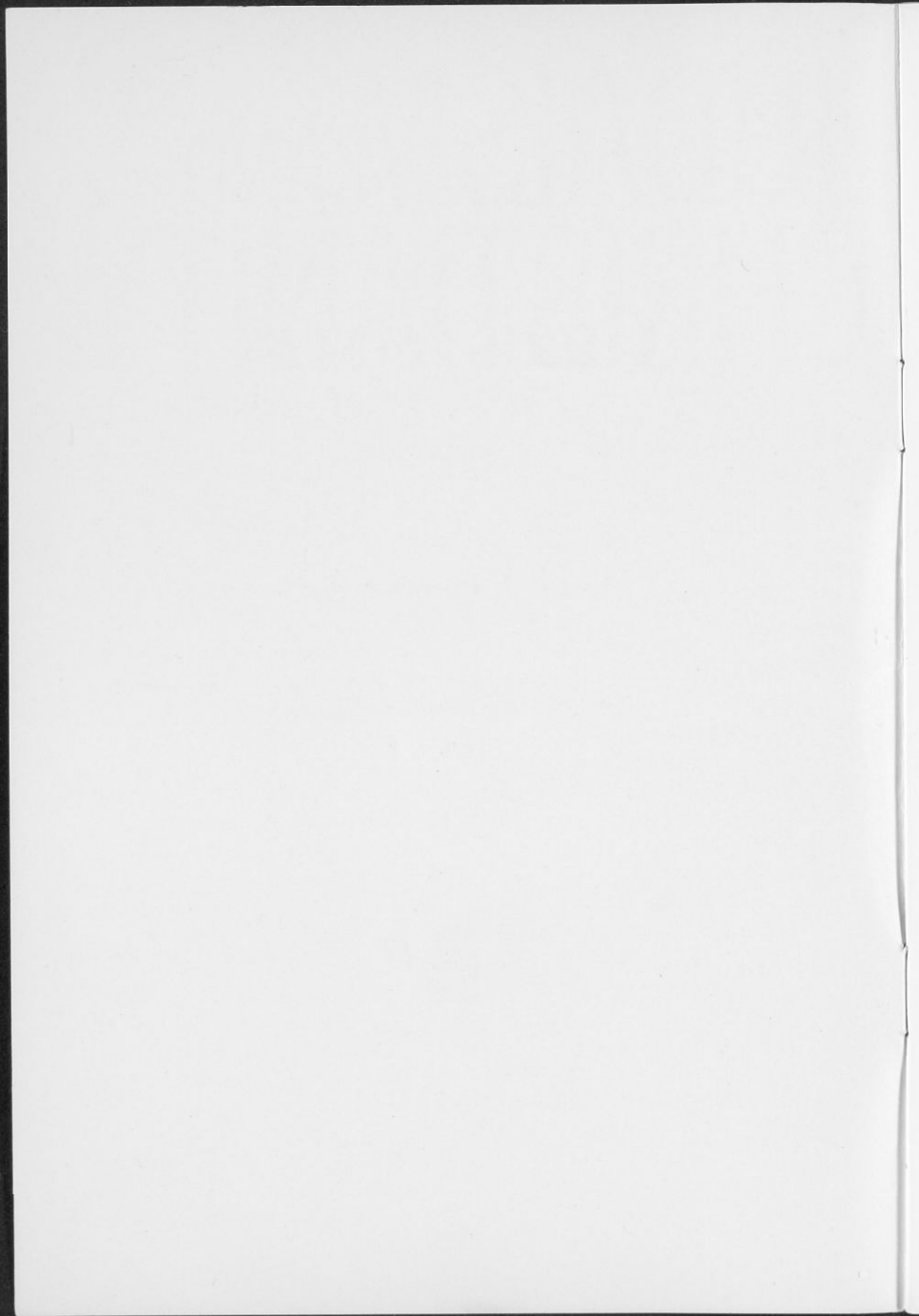
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JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

VICTOR J. DONOVAN, C.P.



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by

Victor J. Donovan, C.P.

(With Study-Club Questions)



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Introduction

One of the most surprising and yet most gratifying effects of the Second Vatican Council is the unusual interest that Catholics and Jews now show toward one another. The question: "What do the Jews think about the Council?" is heard frequently in Catholic circles. Leading Rabbis have appeared at our conventions and participated in our panel discussions. Their opinions are headlined in the Catholic press. At first sight this popular reaction seems strange, since the immediate concern of the Council is not that of fostering better Jewish relations, but of increasing our efforts toward unity among all Christians. However, it is inevitable that the quest for Christian unity must sooner or later come face to face with Judaism. For as Cardinal Cushing once said in speaking to the Jewish War Veterans of Massachusetts: "If Christianity is a tree, its roots are in Judaism. We stem from Judaism as we stem from our forefathers; the Jews are our spiritual forefathers." These words of His Eminence are an echo of that memorable pronouncement of Pope Pius XI: "Spiritually, we are all Semites!"

Such statements as the above contain profound truths whose conclusions offer much food for thought. They do not receive their proper attention by being lumped together with others of similar import in brief summary statements such as: "Catholicism is the flowering and the fulfillment of Judaism." These claims soon attain the status of pious clichés through repetition. They oversimplify a problem whose solution once required a special divine revelation in order that man might receive his first knowledge of the mystery. They merely hint at the great spiritual treasures to be uncovered by those who seek to relive the thrill of their first discovery.

In other words, what is needed is a return to the age wherein Judaism and Christianity confronted each other for the first time. We should try to relive and feel again the emotions and the intense passion of the hour in which the highest court in Israel, the Sanhedrin, moved to outlaw the new religion and to silence its leaders, the Apostles. We must seek answers to why the new community in Israel, later to be called Christians, was declared anathema by the Synagogue. Why was Gamaliel, "a Pharisee, a teacher of the Law and respected by all the people," able to sway the rest of the judges with his words of caution: "Keep away from these men (the Apostles) and let them alone. For if this plan or work is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it. Else perhaps you may find yourselves fighting even against God" (Acts 5,38-39). What was "this plan?" Who were they who sought "to overthrow it?" These are some of the fundamental questions at the basis of all Jewish-Christian understanding.

"Not to Destroy but to Fulfill"

It all began on the day when the young Rabbi from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth, inaugurated His mission by proclaiming to the people: "Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matt. 5, 17). He made this claim on the slopes of the open hillside, far from the hallowed halls of scribes and scholars. He was not to change it by one iota, even to the day of His death. In fact, He made so bold as to say: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24,35). He spent the last three years of His life in repeating and enlarging His views for the sake of those who were to carry on His work after Him, namely, His Apostles.

Everything He said and did was always related to the first assertion that His work was a fulfillment of all that had preceded, especially since the days of Abraham. "My Father works even until now, and I work." This was the way Jesus had of justifying His mission in life. He allowed no one, not even Peter, His chosen

leader, to come between Himself and His work. "Get behind me, satan, thou art a scandal to me" (Matt. 16,23). A scandal in this sense is a person who attempts to block another's pathway toward a specific goal. Jesus' dying words on the cross: "It is finished!" seem obscure when taken by themselves. But in relation to His first words in the sermon on the mount: "I have not come to destroy but to fulfill," they are seen to be the completion and the crown of the work that must be judged as one whole.

It was no simple matter to see all that our Lord's work entailed. His closest disciples failed to understand the inner meaning of their Master's teaching: "These things His disciples did not at first understand" (John 12,16). They were witnesses of His signs and miracles. They heard His spoken words. Yet the two Disciples of Emmaus probably spoke for all when they said: "We were hoping that it was He (Jesus) who should redeem Israel" (Luke 24,21). They did not understand how a man, dying "accursed" upon a Roman cross, could be the one to fulfill their people's "Law and Prophets." Jesus found it necessary to give those puzzled followers a thorough lesson in biblical interpretation, point by point. "For beginning then with Moses and with all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things referring to Himself" (Luke 24,27). Their eyes were opened to recognize the risen Savior.

Yet the understanding of the mystery of His mission was left to the future workings of the Holy Spirit: "For the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you" (John 14,26). Thus it was only in the light of Pentecost that the Apostles came to perceive the real inner meaning of Christ's teachings. However, even then the process of grasping the full import of what had transpired was conditioned by their Judaic environment. This was not as simple as it seems. It required time during which obscure shades of words and wonders became illumined gradually by the light of divine grace. The harmony between promise and fulfillment appeared slowly in growing splendor. It all seems too simple to us today after 2,000

years of Christian theology. But we must never lose sight of the fact that the original experience took place at a point of human history 20 centuries ago—a period of great complexity. Our study of Christianity must therefore be approached from an appreciation of its original environment.

The 600 Years Before Christ

The Judaism that witnessed the birth of Christianity was a faith that had survived 600 years of some of the worst persecutions and crises in religious history. The Babylonian Captivity, the infiltration of Hellenism, and the disastrous Roman occupation of Palestine, brought influences to bear upon the Jewish people that were to remain imbedded in their religion. The most revolutionary period of all was the half-century spent as exiles in the land of Babylon. This bitter period between 586 and 538 B.C., has been called the watershed of Israel's history. One Jewish historian described it briefly by saying: "One might say that the history of Israel as a nation came to an end and the history of Judaism began." For although Judah died as an independent nation, its religion, commonly referred to as "Juda-ism," arose from the ashes as the Prophets had foretold.

The people of God had come to an end as a nation for the simple reason that they had forsaken the Covenant of Sinai, which had been the only reason for their existence. Had not Yahweh said to them through Moses, their Lawgiver: "Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Ex. 19,5,6). They were appointed as a sacred covenant-people.

Therefore, now that they were dead to all appearances, it was only through a more faithful return to the terms of the Covenant that they could ever hope to live again. This was the reasoning they followed as they sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept.

The transformation of the Jewish people that took place during the hidden years of the Babylonian Captivity can best be

described by two simple words: Conversion and Conviction. Led by the penitential, yet consoling, preaching of Ezechiel, their prophet and fellow-exile, the captives came to acknowledge their great sins of idolatry in every form. False standards came down one by one. The cult of statism was demolished. The pride of the race was humbled. Ended was the practice of those who attributed their sufferings to the sins of their fathers, while using the latter's virtues as a screen for their own infidelities. The Prophet reminded them: "As I live, says the Lord God, I swear that there shall no longer be anyone among you who will repeat this proverb in Israel: 'Fathers have eaten green grapes, thus their children's teeth are on edge.' . . . Only the one who sins shall die. . . . Why should you die, O House of Israel . . . says the Lord God. Return and live!" (Ezech. 18,3.2.20.32)

The Prophet's words were heard and heeded. More and more responded to his call with their personal conversion. They openly confessed their own past offenses. They prayed and they fasted. Deprived of an altar of animal sacrifice, they offered the sacrifice of a contrite heart. God in return gave them the assurance of their deliverance.

When the Babylonian Captivity ended in 538 B.C., the returning exiles were souls with the great conviction that they must henceforth be people of the Law. They had seen God's divine purpose in all their sufferings. Yahweh, their God, was a jealous God. From henceforth they must bind themselves to Him alone. They must observe His decrees in every detail. God had succeeded in removing the world's dross from their lives. They must no longer allow themselves to become unclean by violations of the Law or through defilement from the uncircumcised.

Their newborn faith of conversion and conviction was tested by a century of hardship. Faced externally with danger from hostile enemies and beset with temptations to despair from within, they were sustained in their new allegiance to Yahweh by the words of their holy prophets: Aggeus, Zacharias and Malachias. Finally, God sent two men to them, Esdras and Nehemias, to crown the work begun in exile.

It was on the Hebrew New Year's Day, in 444 B.C., that the people entered into a solemn covenant with heaven by which they promised that they would obey all the ordinances of their holy law-giver, Moses. "All that could understand promising for their brethren, with their chief men. And they came to promise, and swear that they would walk in the Law of God, which He gave in the hand of Moses, the servant of God: that they would do and keep all the commandments of the Lord, our God, and His judgments and His ceremonies" (Neh.10,29). They had become "The People of the Book." The measure of their holiness and fidelity to God had become established. It was to be the Law.

Judaic Institutions

This act of solemn dedication to God's word can never be stressed enough by those aiming to understand Judaism's firm religious convictions, especially at the time of Christ. It was from this complete commitment to the Torah that all later institutions proceeded. Thus synagogues, schools, courts, sects and rituals were established to preserve Judaism in the face of possible destruction from Greek, Syrian, and Roman invaders. The people fairly wrapped themselves in God by encircling themselves with the works of the Law.

Synagogue

The synagogue, "religious assembly," was brought into existence to meet the added needs of people who, due to no fault of their own, found themselves cut off from contact with the Temple, the official center of worship in Jerusalem. The purpose of this religious assemblage was for the public reading and study of the sacred scriptures, especially the Five Books of Moses.

The synagogue grew in popularity and in importance with the passing of time. It also acquired the nature of a house of worship, even though the three annual pilgrimages were still made to the Temple by law. Synagogues sprang up in every city and country with a Jewish population. In Jerusalem alone it was said that

more than 300 existed at the time of Christ. Thus it has become impossible to overestimate their value because no single factor, outside the influence of the home, contributed more to the strength and growth of Judaism than did the synagogue.

The "Scribes"

The men who wielded the greatest power in these religious gatherings were the teachers and doctors of the Law, called "Scribes." Their primary concern was to interpret the laws of the Bible in their application to every aspect of daily life, whether social, economic, civil, or domestic. They adapted the applications of the Law to meet the changing times and conditions. Accordingly, they sought to mitigate the more severe measures and to make the impractical practical. They also forestalled inadvertent violations of the more solemn decrees, such as the Sabbath observance, by surrounding them with what were called "fences" or "hedges." Thus to avoid the possibility of doing any manual labor on the Sabbath, people were forbidden to carry anything in their hands on that day.

This practice of adding to the Law had a tendency to become exaggerated. It also spurred the Scribes to greater zeal for religious observances. In time they became responsible for the organization of daily worship in the synagogue and home. It was inevitable that they should cross swords sooner or later with anyone who would oppose their opinions and decisions. Thus the Scribes are often mentioned in the Gospel as a group with whom Jesus often came in conflict. Their first estimate of Him flowed from the fact that He came to them without credentials. He was considered like one of "the people of the land," the "Am ha-Aretz," since he was from Galilee, a section notorious for its ignorance of the Law. That explains why he amazed them all: "And the Jews marvelled, saying: 'How does this man come by learning, since he has not studied'" (John 7,15).

The frequent mention of the Scribes in relation to their disputes with Christ should not cause anyone to underestimate their

great work in behalf of God and religion. The fact that the world has the Bible today is due in great part to the dedicated services of these learned and holy men. Disagreements often receive more publicity than agreements. Even the writings of the Evangelists were no exception to this rule. As a matter of fact, our Lord probably found Himself in agreement with the Scribes more often than not. Thus he urged His followers: "All things, therefore, that they command you, observe and do" (Matt. 23,3). And of another Scribe He said: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12,34). Discussions with these learned scholars brought out some of the most revealing thoughts in our Lord's teaching. This alone should be enough to place us in debt to the Scribes.

Pharisees

The true spiritual leaders in Judaism were the Pharisees. Their name, "Pharisee," which means "separatist," or "isolationist," was first applied to them out of contempt by their enemies. They later adopted it themselves as a compliment, since it set them apart from all nonbelievers and their less observant brethren. They were people who made no compromise with the world. They believed that true holiness consisted in the full observance of the Law to the minutest detail. Their creed embraced faith in the immortality of the soul, resurrection of the body, retribution in the afterlife, existence of angels and spirits, and divine providence. They placed "the traditions of the ancients," or oral law, on an equal footing with the written Law and had great influence among the common people, who admired them for their zeal. Compromised by the spread of secularism among the priests, this influence increased in proportion to the decline of the priests' power.

The destruction of the Temple in the year 70 A.D., with its accompanying suspension of all sacrificial priestly functions, left the dominant power in the hands of the Pharisees. The fact that they had based their piety upon the Law, instead of upon human institutions, was providential, for their form of religion was able

to survive in the hearts of the faithful regardless of the temporal losses due to war and dispersion.

The Pharisees had occupied the position of official interpreters in Judaism for so many years that they grew to resent any new challenge to their authority, such as came from Jesus and his Disciples. By necessity they had to take a firm stand against the preaching of the new gospel. As a result they are often depicted as villains in the Christian version of the religious struggles of the first century. Yet they should always be recognized as representatives of what had been the highest and purest form of Judaism. They numbered some of the most sincere and pious souls in Israel, among them Nicodemus, Gamaliel, and Saul the Pharisee, who later became Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Sadducees

Another prominent party among the Jews of the first century were the Sadducees, who drew their strength from the priestly aristocracy and secular nobility. Their religious beliefs were more conservative than those of the Pharisees. They clung to the older forms of Jewish doctrine, such as the Torah itself without any accompanying development of oral tradition. They fought to maintain the "status quo." They were also practical men who were willing to go to considerable lengths of compromise in order to preserve their social position, even to collaboration with their Roman rulers. Their policies, therefore, were not popular among the common people, who resented the presence of the heathen foreigners in their holy land.

In addition, the Sadducean attachment to the Temple priesthood proved disastrous, for they fell into oblivion with the fall of the Temple under Titus, the Roman general. Their opposition to Christianity was mostly one of self-interest. They appeared at their strongest in their dispute with Christ over the subject of the resurrection of the body, which they denied (Matt. 22,23).

Essenes

Although fewer in number than both the Pharisees or the

Sadducees, the Essenes also constituted a sect of Judaism. Renewed interest in this group has been stimulated recently by the discovery of the sacred scrolls of Qumran on the western side of the Dead Sea. This ultra pious community seems to have been composed of priests and laymen who considered the priests then functioning in Jerusalem during the second century before Christ as illegitimate and apostate. They, therefore, withdrew from participation in the Temple cult and in public protest took refuge in the wilderness of the Dead Sea area. There they shared a common ascetical life while awaiting the expected final struggle between "the children of darkness" and "the children of light."

Of course, they regarded themselves as children of the light and the people of the New Covenant. They followed their own religious calendar and rendered their own interpretation of the various books of the Bible, especially that of Isaiah the Prophet. They are not mentioned in the New Testament, even though some writers have tried to find a connection between them and our Lord, but without success. Their importance to our study lies in the fact that they furnish evidence to show that there was a serious trend in Judaism looking for the momentary fulfillment of final prophecy at the very time in which Christ appeared as being that fulfillment in person.

Judaic Principles

In attempting to give some attention to the leading theological ideas of the first century it is obviously impossible to crowd the tenets of Judaism into a few short pages. The best one can do is to point out the basic doctrines upon which all other elements are constructed. Thus the two most essential principles of Judaism were: (1) Belief in the absolute and unmodified unity of God; (2) The election of Israel to be the bearers of that belief throughout the world. These are both based upon the revealed word of God in Deuteronomy 6,4: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One." This profession of faith is known as the "Shema" of Judaism. It is a word meaning: "Hear!"—The Lord speaks; Israel hears and obeys.

Monotheistic Basis

The one and only God of Israel was no abstraction, but a personal God. He was also a jealous God. He made it abundantly clear that He did not want His people to worship strange gods. He burned this fact deep into the heart of Israel during the Babylonian Captivity and Judaism was never allowed to forget it. Monotheism became enshrined as "the holy of holies" into which their human minds must never investigate. This explains the reason why official Judaism recoiled in horror from the teachings of Jesus, when He attempted to reveal to them the intimate nature of their God. The memory of the divine wrath upon their fathers for listening to other teachers, who spoke to them falsely about Yahweh, caused them to block their ears to Christ. The Christian Trinity appeared to them as a denial of the essential unity of Yahweh. They had been conditioned never to think otherwise. Christ's words: "I and the Father are One" (John 10,30) were blasphemy to them. They, therefore, "took up stones to stone Him" for death by stoning was the penalty for such a crime in their eyes.

Judaism assigned the creation of the world to the same God who continues to watch over and guide it. As the Jewish sage once said: "God created the world and He provides; He made it and He sustains." This applied to individuals as well as to nations. No truth is more evident in the lives of the Jews than this awareness of God's providence. Nothing happens that is not the work of God in some manner. He governs all according to His law, which is eternally valid, immutable, and sure. He rewards each according to his deserts. All things are guided to their consummation according to His eternal purposes. Judaism was convinced of God's intervention in their human affairs. This explains their insistence in demanding of Christ "a sign from heaven." God had always confirmed the words of His envoys by signs and wonders since the days of Moses in Egypt.

Angels

Judaism admitted that Yahweh sometimes entrusted His power

to intermediaries called angels. Their nature was not defined apart from the fact that they were spirits who were called arch-angels, guardian angels and choirs of angels without number. Their main functions were to be intermediaries of divine revelation. Inasmuch as belief in angels was a later development in Judaism, following the progressive elevation of Yahweh above common contact with his creatures, it was a doctrine not acceptable to the Sadducees, who refused to admit any novelty of tradition. Yet the more influential group of leaders, the Pharisees, held to it as being representative of Judaism. It was also part of the heritage which the first Christians found wholly agreeable, evidenced by the prominent part played by angels in the Gospel narratives.

Attention was also given to demons or bad angels. The chief of these was Satan. The function of these fallen angels was to tempt men and to lead them in opposition to the will of God. Thus our Lord once referred to Peter as "Satan," inasmuch as the Apostle suggested an action contrary to God's will. This belief in evil spirits seems to have become explicit during the Babylonian Captivity when Jews were exposed to the highly developed form of pagan demonology. Jesus was frequently asked to cast out devils from the sick and the possessed. He was even accused of harboring a devil Himself. He answered all such accusations by attributing His power over the sick to "the finger of God." This was a technical expression that was meant to remind the people of the earlier days of simple faith when their forefathers attributed everything to "the hand of God."

Resurrection of the Dead

Another doctrine of Judaism, which came into prominence following the Babylonian Captivity, was the belief in the resurrection of the dead. This seemed to have become a necessity from a consideration of God's divine justice. Scribes were driven more and more to seek a solution to the problem of suffering, especially when it was concerned with the sufferings of the just. The answer that God would eventually vindicate himself beyond the grave by

rewarding His friends, who gave their lives for Him, became an absolute necessity for the majority of Christ's contemporaries. The Sadducees opposed it on the grounds that it was not contained in the written Law. It was a doctrine that became part of Christianity.

Israel: Bearer of God's Revelation

Pre-Christian Judaism with its biblical concept of God had more to offer to the world than other religions of that time. The conviction that Yahweh had chosen Israel to be the bearer of his revelation to the world became an essential doctrine, second only to monotheism in importance. Israel had always considered herself to be God's special possession. Tradition, as far back as Abraham, had maintained this belief through God's promise: "In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12,3). Prophets called Israel, "A light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 42,6) and the people had never lost this sense of worldmission. However, it became altered under the cruel pounding of history.

The shock suffered by the people in their Babylonian Exile caused an entire reappraisal of their position in the world. They began to place greater emphasis upon their aloofness from the world with all its moral contamination. They withdrew behind the barriers of the Law. Increasingly, they interpreted their title, "Chosen People," in an exclusive sense.

Efforts, such as those seen in the Book of Jonas, were made to revise their attitude. The truth was shown to them that their divine election was for service to the world and not in special favors for themselves. Contrary forces acted and reacted upon their minds. The consciousness of having a universal mission was counterbalanced by the horrors of past spiritual defilement; it produced a dilemma that received no official solution. The inherited tendency toward universalism could never be suppressed; its spirit persisted, even while Judaism progressively withdrew into herself. The belief that the Gentiles would one day turn to the worship of Yahweh still endured but the manner of its fulfillment was left in the hands of the Almighty—a mystery.

Christianity inherited this same mystery from Judaism. Its solution required a direct revelation from heaven. The answer is set forth in the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It tells of the visions experienced by Cornelius the centurion and Peter the Apostle, which resulted in receiving Gentiles into Jesus Christ through baptism.

✓ The Messiah

Every consideration of the beliefs of Judaism at the time of Christ eventually comes to the question of the Messiah. This is a complex question. It does not have the simplicity of a definition with 2,000 years of Christianity behind it. The word itself simply means "an anointed one." It was used in the Old Testament to refer to those who received a ceremonial anointing with oil in the rite of assuming such offices as king and priest. Eventually the term came to be used in a technical sense to refer to the anointed representative of Yahweh whose office it was to usher in the Messianic Age.

This technical use of the word, Messiah, does not appear at all in the biblical books of the Old Testament. It only appears later in the apocryphal writings, such as the Book of Henoch and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. While these books were not considered inspired, they were reliable witnesses to a belief in a personal Messiah during the two centuries preceding Christ. The scrolls of Qumran spoke of the coming of two Messiahs; one of Aaron and one of Israel. Although various powers and dignities were assigned to this mysterious figure none went so far as to call him divine. He was never considered equal to God; He was God's agent, but not identical with Him.

The clearest delineation of how the coming Messiah appeared to a Pharisee was given in the uncanonical Psalm 17. This was one of a collection called the "Psalms of Solomon." It was dated within fifty years of the birth of Christ and described the Messiah as a king of the House of David, raised up by God to deliver Israel from her enemies. He was to be rich in wisdom and knowl-

edge. His power would crush the oppressors and bring the pagans under His yoke. His reign would be one of justice and peace. This was truly a noble figure though tending to be more nationalistic than religious. It was a figure capable of instilling confidence into the hearts of people grumbling under Roman domination.

Yet it was also a very explosive one. This may be the reason why Christ consistently avoided using the title "Messiah" of Himself. The only time in which He permitted its use took place in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, as told in John's narrative (John 4,25-27). The danger of false delusions seemed very remote in her case. Being a Samaritan and antagonistic to all Jews, she would be least likely to interpret the term in any nationalistic sense favorable to them. Her people would be more inclined to see it in its universal connotation. This was borne out in what followed as many Samaritans came to accept him, saying: "We know that this is in truth the Savior of the World" (John 4,42).

Differences in Messianic Teaching

The fact that our Lord avoided the use of the technical title "Messiah," should not be taken to mean that he never claimed to be "the expected one." Neither does it mean that the messianic hope, divinely implanted in the minds and hearts of His Chosen People from the days of Abraham was just a plaything of the gods. It means that Christ chose other ways and means of showing Himself to be the Messiah in His Messianic Kingdom, the Church. And in this process of teaching arises the distinction between Judaism and Christianity.

The Gospel narratives offer the account of many occasions in which Christ entered into discussion with some of the best minds in Judaism over the subject of the Messiah and messianic days. They were usually accompanied by a great deal of the emotion commonly found in public debates. However, none went to the heart of the matter, namely the essential differences between the teaching of Christ and that of the Pharisees, with greater calmness and with more objectivity than the dialogue held between our

Lord and Nicodemus. It was a meeting that took place far from the noise of partisan crowds and in the still of night. Nicodemus was a leading member of the legal institution, the Sanhedrin, and a pillar of Pharisaism. In his curiosity about Christ he manifested a sincere interest in the ideas of his fellow-rabbi from Nazareth. Jesus reciprocated by showing great respect for his visitor's biblical acumen.

Nicodemus raised the question of our Lord's teaching. His answer was: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3,5). This was fundamental to all understanding of His mission to the world. He had come to make all things new. His work was one of messianic renovation and fulfillment. It was not one of destruction. He was asking men to be born again.

Nicodemus may have rightly suspected that a rebirth in the spirit meant a death to the old Law as a necessary prerequisite. It was a delicate position for "a teacher in Israel." So he responded to Christ's words with silence, after expressing himself weakly by the questions: "How can these things be?" This silence seems significant. It was the state of a soul afraid to admit the new and at the same time unwilling to deny the old. It might be likened to what Karl Stern has called "The Anguish of Regeneration," the title of the eighteenth chapter of his famous book, *The Pillar of Fire*.

Jesus could have chosen to cite the words of Ezechiel, the Prophet: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities . . . I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you . . ." (Ezech. 36,25-26). This might have led to a fruitless discussion of texts as had happened so often on other occasions with the Scribes and Pharisees. What Jesus had in mind for Nicodemus was a revelation of greater truths. In rapid order He gave insights into His heavenly origin, His future death, His testimony of God's love for all men, and the way of salvation which led through faith in Himself. Thus the different stages of the new life, hitherto unknown to man, were revealed to this sincere inquirer from the Pharisees.

A New Interpretation of the Law

This new spirit which our Lord held out to Nicodemus was everywhere shown in His interpretation of the Law of Moses. He had said repeatedly that He had come to fulfill the Law, not to destroy it. "For amen I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away not one jot or one tittle shall be lost from the Law till all things have been accomplished" (Matt. 5,18). By saying this Jesus showed His intention of forestalling all suspicion that His enemies might have against Him. He was not making light of the Law. On the contrary, He was raising it to a dignity never before known to the mind of man. He had come to infuse a new spirit into the understanding of the Law and to raise the old moral order into a new and higher form of holiness.

In six different sections of His revolutionary sermon on the mount, Jesus emphasized the contrast between His interpretation of the Torah and the usually accepted form of Pharisaic observance. The difference was marked by the words: "You have heard that it was said. . . . But I say to you. . ." The Law of Moses prohibited homicide and adultery; Jesus forbade hatred and impure desires. The Law permitted a man to repudiate his wife; Jesus commanded union till death.

Throughout the six parallels contained in the sermon only one idea was uppermost: the more perfect observance of the Law. External compliance with the letter of the Law in avoiding murder, adultery, divorce, perjury, vengeance, and other public acts was not enough, Jesus meant the Law to be observed in the interior of a man's soul. It meant being in His own words: "You, therefore, are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5,48). This had been the original ideal set before every child of the Covenant, as Yahweh had commanded them in the words of Leviticus, 19,2: "Be ye holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy." To accomplish this there was required a new spiritual law written, not on tablets of stone, but in the hearts of men. The Prophets had promised that this would come to pass only in Messianic times and the Gospel announced that the messianic times

had come at last. Christ's teaching was the new spiritual law of the heart.

Christ's Three Titles

The people "were astonished at his teaching; for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes" (Mark 1,21-22). They hailed Him as "Son of David," which to them was a popular messianic title and one fraught with dreams of earthly glory. They tried to make Christ fulfill their hopes for such a king. But Jesus knew that what was in their minds was a false conception of the true Messiah. His kingdom was not of this world. He, therefore, never referred to Himself as "Son of David," yet neither did He deny it when others said it of Him because Jesus knew that He would go on to fulfill God's promise of a king in His own way and not in theirs. His rule was to be one over the minds and hearts of men.

The title which He chose for Himself was "Son of Man," a name of mystery and also one of prophecy, for it was a term that could signify both human nature and, as in the mind of Daniel the Prophet, a figure of heavenly origin. Thus in the human and natures of Jesus Christ this title attained its full messianic dimensions. He was the one who also identified this designation of Himself, Son of Man, with that of the "Suffering Servant of Yahweh," as described by Isaiah, the Prophet. This was an association of ideas that was even more than Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, could fathom. His protest against Christ's mention of His coming sufferings brought forth the strongest rebuke ever uttered by the Master to any of His disciples: "Get behind me, satan, for thou dost not mind the things of God, but those of men" (Mark 8,31-33).

The task of explaining how these three terms, "Son of David," "Son of Man," and "Suffering Servant," were to be identified with Christ was left to the Holy Spirit. Jesus' earthly mission was to bring to perfection all the elements of the old dispensation. Everything from the rite of circumcision, through the observance of all the sacred feasts, to the spiritual significance of the Temple in

Jerusalem, were brought together and fulfilled in Christ. His life's work was crowned by His death and resurrection but not before He had created a new "People of God." This was done at Passover on the anniversary of the first creation of God's People in the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt.

To the very end Jesus kept Himself within the sphere of His people and their institutions which He had come to fulfill. Only once was He ever mentioned in the Gospel as having carried His mission beyond the borders of His own country. He protested that He was sent to the "lost sheep of Israel." This was done on divine purpose because before the new People of God could become the bearers of His revelation to the four corners of the earth, they had to be formed into one mystical body, the Church. Thus Twelve Apostles, with their Master at their head, assembled on Mount Zion in imitation of the Twelve Tribes of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Jesus proclaimed to them His new Law of loving others as He had loved them. The covenant constituting them a new People was established and sealed with Christ's blood. The covenant banquet was shared by all. Thus was fulfilled the new and eternal covenant spoken of by Jeremiah the Prophet: "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Juda . . . And this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place My law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31,31-33). On the following day the definitive word was spoken by Christ on the cross: "It is consummated" (John 19,30).

The Last Supper

The one point in our Lord's life from which to survey the entire panorama of religious history, past, present, and future, was the night of the Last Supper. Jesus used it for the twofold purpose of looking back to the past and ahead to the future. The Paschal Meal was the traditional meal of the Jews, wherein all the wonders of God were commemorated and made to live again.

This was especially true at the table where our Lord reclined with his Apostles. Jesus spoke with special emphasis when he said: "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" . . . (Luke 22,15). He used the ceremony as a means of reviewing all the manifestations of God's love for His Chosen People in bringing them forth from Egypt, with the added review of all the wonders which He had done for those whom He had chosen and brought forth out of a sinful world. He identified Moses with Himself. In like manner He made the Apostles one with Himself, saying: "Abide in Me, and I in you . . . I am the vine, you are the branches. . . . No longer do I call you servants . . . But I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15,4,5,15,16).

Several times He referred to "the kingdom of heaven." And while doing so, He gave them His body and His blood under the appearance of bread and wine. It was a scene to remind them of Isaiah's prophecy of the Messianic Kingdom to come: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples. A feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food, and pure choice wines" (Isa. 25,6). Our Lord's words: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22, 20) became superimposed on the words of Yahweh at the First Passover: "This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution" (Ex. 12,14). The Old Pasch became fused with the New forever in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Even with all these proofs of love for His Apostles, Jesus knew that their loyalty was like that of sheep. And so He revealed to them: "You will all be scandalized this night because of Me; for it is written: 'I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Matt. 26-31; Zach. 13,7).

Everything happened as Christ had predicted. He was crucified. He was abandoned by His "sheep." He was buried. On the third day He rose again from the dead. He appeared to His "little flock." His first word to them was: "Shalom!" ("Peace!"). He

remained with them for forty days, renewing His teachings and commissioning them to be His "witnesses" throughout all the world (Luke 24,47-48). This was done that they might remember the Israel of old with whom Yahweh had remained for forty years in the desert and whom He made His "witnesses" among the nations (Isa. 55,5).

Judaism's Reaction

Before passing on to consider the later developments in God's plan for the "New Israel," His Church, it would be profitable to learn Judaism's official reaction to Christ's claim of fulfilling the Law. It may come as a surprise to find that the official spokesman for Judaism, the chief priests, unwittingly testified to the fact in the affirmative, though not in the same sense that our Lord intended it. They swore that Christ must die for the Law. "We have a Law and according to that Law he must die; because He has made Himself Son of God" (John 19,7). They called it the law of blasphemy, for which the punishment was death. It was originally meant to entail death "by stoning" but God had decreed that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. . . ." (John 3,14). Pilate and the Roman soldiers took the execution of the death penalty out of the hands of the chief priests. They crucified the Messiah upon the cross because Rome had the power and Christ died because Judaism had the Law.

The amazing significance of God's decision to be born and to die as a Jew has always baffled the greatest minds in the world. The religious thinkers refer to it as a divine mystery. Caiphas, the high priest, called it expediency, saying, "that it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (John 18,14). John, the theologian, saw more than political expediency in his Master's death. He saw in it the light of prophetic fulfillment, for he said of Caiphas: "But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was to die for the nation; and not only for the nation but that He might gather into one the children of God, who were scattered abroad" (John 11,51-53).

It is a well-known fact that no nation other than Israel would have guarded the principle of monotheism so zealously as to make a person's claim to divinity deserving of death. The Greeks held empty niches ready for unknown gods. The Romans divinized their Caesars. Judaism by zealously executing its Law against Jesus enabled him to fulfill the Law. Even though declared innocent of all wrongdoing, he was put to death because of the Law (John 8,46; 10,33; Luke 23,22). Only a Jew, who was God, could have died in the name of and in accordance with the Law of the "Old Israel" and have risen again in the same Person to create the "New Israel." This was the fulfillment of which Paul, the Pharisee, wrote: "But when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, that he might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4,4,5).

Fulfillment of Messianic Promise

Christ united Himself the three main lines of messianic promise: "Son of David," "Son of Man," and "Suffering Servant of Yahweh." The Romans crucified Him as "King of the Jews," so that Christ might show Himself to be the Messianic King according to the eternal promises given to the "Son of David." Judaism condemned Him as a son of man, so that Christ might appear in the glorious light of the messianic fulfillment of the "Son of Man," as He had said: "And you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14,62). Divine justice demanded the death of the "Suffering Servant of Yahweh," so that the world might see that: "If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be fulfilled through Him" (Isa. 53,10). "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into His glory?" (Luke 24,26). Thus, likewise, our Lord gathered up into Himself the threefold office of King, Prophet, and Priest.

The light, by which this fulfillment was seen, burst upon the world at Pentecost. This was the great feast in the religious life

of Judaism which commemorated the fiftieth day after the First Passover, when Yahweh entered into a solemn covenant with His People on Mount Sinai. He manifested His divine Presence by great "peals of thunder and lightning." He constituted the Israelites as His "qahal," or church of the desert, saying to them: "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Ex. 19,6).

On the fiftieth day after our Lord's Passover, while all the Disciples were gathered together on Mount Sion: "There suddenly came a sound from heaven . . . and there appeared to them parted tongues of fire, which settled upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . ." (Acts 2,2-4). A new "qahal," or congregation of the New Israel, had become constituted by God's presence in each one of his faithful Disciples. The new covenant had been fulfilled. Mindful of the full import of what had taken place, St. Peter was later to apply to the Church the same words that Yahweh had first addressed to the Israel of old: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation . . ." (I Pet. 2,9).

Apostles Continue Judaic Tradition

The Apostles knew that "the last days" foretold by the prophets had begun to come to pass. They looked upon themselves as the "New Israel," the "People of God." They immediately assumed the burden of being witnesses to Christ "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the very ends of the earth" (Acts 1,8). St. Peter set the example for their preaching. Free of all bitterness and arrogance he preached in all sincerity and humility as one who felt a kinship with those to whom he spoke. He stressed Jesus the Christ, as being the fulfillment of all the Hebrew prophets and as "a man approved by God among you by miracles, wonders, and signs" (Acts 2,22). God blessed the purity of His approach to His fellow Jews. On that memorable day of Pentecost, 3,000 souls were added to the newborn Christian community.

The Disciples then began to confer Christian baptism for the first time. They imposed hands upon the new converts in expres-

sion of their participation in the new life of the Spirit. At the same time they still continued to observe all the prescriptions of the Torah. They never thought of themselves as anything else but Jews to whom God had fulfilled his promises: "They continued daily with one accord in the Temple" (Acts 2,46).

Their form of assembly was described in the words of St. Luke: "And they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the Apostles and in the communion of the breaking of the bread and in the prayers" (Acts 2,42). These three elements of community—in faith, in mutual fraternity, and in prayers—have always gone to make up the Church in itself and are still evident today wherever the Church is to be found.

Great emphasis in the Apostles' instruction and preaching was placed upon the retelling of Christ's life, death and resurrection as being the long-awaited fulfillment of the ancient prophecies. It was for this purpose that the Holy Spirit had been sent by the Father in the name of Christ to "bring to your mind whatever I have said to you" (John 14,26). The words "thus was fulfilled" and "in order that the words of the prophets might be fulfilled," recur time and time again throughout the Gospel. St. Matthew alone cited twelve instances where the Hebrew Scriptures were "fulfilled" in Christ.

Thus the original community of Disciples continued to preach in Jerusalem. The Lord confirmed their words by miracles. Soon their number increased to 5,000 but they were still considered as another sect among several in Judaism, and were referred to as followers of "The Way."

Christians Are Dispersed

Soon signs began to increase that the infant Church had become too broad for its narrow cradle of Judaism. The first great crisis was brought to a head by the bold preaching of a deacon named Stephen. He was described as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." He was also a liberal who understood the essential message of Christianity, namely, its universality. His public exposition of God's universal plan for the salvation of all

men caused him to be hauled before the Sanhedrin on charges of blasphemy.

In an eloquent defense of his thesis he showed his judges the ephemeral nature of the Mosaic institutions. He ended his apologia with the cry: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7,56). This sealed his fate. It also marked the beginning of a violent persecution of the whole Church of Jerusalem, which up to that time had been looked upon as a minor sect of Judaism. The Christians dispersed into the outlying districts around Judea and Samaria. Fortunately this dispersal proved providential, for everywhere they went they carried the seed of the Gospel with them. In Antioch the seed fell among Gentiles as well as Jews. "And it was in Antioch that the Disciples were first called 'Christians'" (Acts 11,26)—that is to say, "Messianists."

The amazing growth of the Church at Antioch was not to be an unmixed blessing. In fact, it presented the infant Church in Jerusalem with a dilemma calling for a final and definitive solution. A choice had to be made between the Jewish principle of the Law or the Christian principle of liberty in Christ the Lord. The dogmatic decision in favor of the latter was more effective than any miracle in proving that the Divine Presence dwelt in the little "Remnant of Israel," the Church.

Beginning of the Church's Universality

The events leading up to this decision showed Barnabas being sent by the Mother Church in Jerusalem to conduct an official visitation of the Antiochian community composed of Gentile and Jewish Christians, with the Gentiles in the majority. The apostolic investigator was not only convinced that he had seen the unfolding of God's plan for the salvation of all mankind, but he also joined himself to its cause. He thereupon summoned Saul, the convert Pharisee, out of retirement in Tarsus, to enlist his aid in carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles. That was the turning point. Events began to pick up momentum. The evangelization of the world had begun.

Saul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey away from the shores of Palestine. Their expedition took them to Cyprus, Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and return. They preached first to the Jews in their synagogues, then to the pagans in the market place. They returned with glowing proof of the fruit of the Word of God, especially among the Gentiles. In the meantime some Jewish Christians had come down to Antioch from Jerusalem demanding that all the brethren, both Gentiles and Jews alike, be circumcised, in spite of the freedom from Jewish ritual proclaimed by Saul and Barnabas. Spokesmen from both sides were sent to the Mother Church for a discussion of the question.

The so-called Council of Jerusalem was thereupon convoked to decide the case in about the year 49. Under divine guidance, James, Peter's successor as bishop of Jerusalem, declared the absolute liberation of the Church from the yoke of Judaism. It was a definitive pronouncement attesting to the universality of the Church and it dealt a death blow to the narrow restrictions that then threatened the growth of the Gospel. Those who had looked upon Jerusalem and the Temple as focal points where all men must come in answer to their call to enter the Messianic Kingdom, now were made to see that the new Jerusalem must be carried abroad to all men in the Spirit. The new Temple of God's dwelling among men was meant to be raised in the hearts of all mankind made one in Christ Jesus who "is the same, yesterday, and today, yea, and forever" (Heb. 13,8). The fulfillment of that plan is told in the annals of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

It is sufficient for our present purpose to see how the last determined act was accomplished in the destruction of the holy Temple in Jerusalem under Titus in the year 70. The time had come for the words of Christ to the Samaritan woman to be fulfilled: "Woman, believe me the hour is coming when neither on this mountain (Garizim) nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . But the hour is coming, and is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth . . ." (John 4,21.23).

The material Temple had become like the gantry standing beside the rocket on the launching pad at Canaveral. When that had been withdrawn by its final destruction the Church was on its way out into space and into its continual orbit about God's kingdom on earth. The mission to carry out the orders of its Divine Planner had begun: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world" (Matt. 28,19-20).

Conclusion

This brief study of Judaism and Christianity has probably raised more questions in the mind of its readers than it has answered. This has been our intention to a certain extent. For questions are the material out of which dialogues are made. And dialogues are among the most rewarding experiences of intelligent beings in manifesting their devotion to truth. This may have been the reason why the only incident told about the hidden years of our Lord's life was His dialogue with the doctors in the Temple at an age when all Jewish boys were expected to come to a knowledge of the Torah, which today is called the time of their "Bar Mitzvah." The Gospel says: ". . . they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2,46). It was our Lord's way of manifesting His mission by anticipation, as He was later to repeat time and time again, especially to Pilate on the eve of his execution: "This is why I was born, and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (John 18,37).

Christ's dialogues with the Scribes and Pharisees were always centered upon the Law and the Prophets. He welcomed their questions. He, on His part, left them one question which has never failed to occupy the attention of Jews and Christians for 2,000 years. The question was: "What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?" (Matt. 22,42). Christianity gave its answer

irrevocably in the words of St. Peter's profession of faith: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16,16). Judaism has yet to render its final decision.

It seems significant that a Pharisee Christian writing after Christ would be in agreement with a Pharisee Jew writing before Christ. St. Paul said: "Love does no evil to a neighbor. Love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom. 13,10). The Apostle's counterpart in Judaism, Hillel, made this observation when, according to tradition, he was asked to summarize the Jewish religion: "What is hateful to thee, do not unto thy fellow-man: this is the whole Law; the rest is mere commentary" (Shab. 31a). Could it be possible that they both met in Him Who said: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another: that as I have loved you, you also love one another" (John 13,34).

On the same night in which Jesus fulfilled the old covenant He also made a new one by identifying all men with Himself in the Spirit of Love. Thus He was placing Himself as the ultimate destiny of both Torah and Faith. It seems, therefore, that the goal of all dialogue between Judaism and Christianity today should be to show to Jew and Christian alike that Christ is in the Law and that the Law is in Christ. How this can be done is pointed out to us in the beautiful lesson of our late Holy Father, Pope John XXIII, who opened his arms in a gesture of love to delegates of the United Jewish Appeal in Rome and said: "I am Joseph your brother!" Any approach made by us in any other spirit would seem unworthy of the name, Christian.

STUDY-CLUB QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus call Peter "satan" and "a scandal"?
2. What did the Disciples first think that Christ's work entailed? How did Christ enlighten them?
3. What significance has the Babylonian Captivity for Judaism?
4. The Babylonian Captivity has been described by the words *Conversion* and *Conviction*. Explain what these terms mean with regard to the re-examination of Judaism.
5. Give a short description of the synagogue and its function.
6. Describe how "the Scribes" came into conflict with Jesus and the debt the Christians owe them.
7. The Pharisees played an important role in the organization of Judaism. Give a description of their power.
8. Analyze the position of the Sadducees in first century Judaism.
9. Who were the Essenes and what did they advocate?
10. What were the two most essential principles of Judaism at the time of Christ?
11. Explain why the Jews of Christ's era might have been skeptical of the trinitarian aspect of God.
12. Why did the Jews demand a "sign from heaven" with regard to Christ? On what could you base a defense of their position?
13. Beliefs in angels, demons and the resurrection from the dead had their beginnings in Judaism. Which groups supported these beliefs?
14. Explain the universality of Judaism and how it became submerged.
15. Are there evidences of a Judaic belief in the imminence of the Messiah at the time of Christ? How do you arrive at your conclusion?
16. What significance has the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus?
17. In general terms describe Christ's interpretation of Mosaic Law.
18. How do "Son of David," "Son of Man," and "Suffering Servant" differ in their application to Christ?
19. Who are the "People of God"? How has this term changed in its usage?
20. The Last Supper can be viewed as a connection between the Judaic teachings and the foundation of Christianity. Point out some of the references which Christ used to ease the transition for His Apostles.

21. How might Israel's zeal for monotheism be responsible for Christ's death? Explain the law of blasphemy.
22. With His death Christ answered the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Give some examples of this fulfillment.
23. Point out some indications of the Apostle's retention of Judaic tradition and customs.
24. St. Stephen was instrumental in the dispersal of the Christians from Jerusalem. Explain how this came about.
25. What is the importance of the Council of Jerusalem in 49 A.D.?

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