

SOURCE BOOK: JEWISH APPROACHES TO JESUS

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Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891)

‘Messianic expectations and origins of Christianity’ in *History of the Jews; From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London; Jewish Chronicle, 1901), vol 2, chapter 6, ed. by & trans. by Bella Lowy from German original *Geschichte der Juden* (1853-1870).

Graetz’s background: Jewish historian and biblical scholar. Born in Poland, where he enjoyed a traditional yeshiva education. Despite a spiritual crisis brought on by the influence of the Haskalah, he remained Orthodox. In Berlin, he lectured to theology students on Jewish history. Regarded as the father of Jewish historiography, his *History of the Jews* (originally 11 volumes) was the first comprehensive history of the Jews and represents a defence against the Christian critique of Judaism as fossilised legalism. It emphasises Judaism’s ethical values, its task to impart these values to the world, its status as the sole monotheistic faith and the only rational religion, and the eternal relevance of its essential ideas. The work reflects throughout an anti-Christian strain. It adopts a radical historical critical approach to the NT, and points to the failures of Christianity as a religion and the impracticalities of its ethics for a healthy society.

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus was an Essene, a contemplator, a renouncer of life (150), who aimed to prepare the people for the ‘messianic time’ (155). In comparison with contemporary rabbis, eg Hillel, Jesus was less knowledgeable (149). His influence is largely due to the effect of his miraculous deeds (156-7). While he never explicitly claimed to be divine (159), he did have messianic pretensions (158-9).

Jesus and the Law: Jesus never intended to attack Judaism or abolish the ceremonial laws. He kept the Sabbath laws, and was not against sacrifice or fasting or fringes. He only spoke to Jews (155-6).

The Question of Originality: Graetz regards Jesus positively where he regards him as Jewish (149,156), and despite recognising his ability to impart the inner force of the Jewish teachings (156), Graetz does not find Jesus original and does not see him as a reformer (155).

Comments:

- For Graetz, Christianity should be regarded as Essenism mixed with foreign elements. Its growth was due to Roman oppression and corresponding high messianic hopes. (142).
- From Graetz’s presentation, any depreciation of Jewish teachings would be seen as equivalent to the depreciation of Jesus (155-6).
- Graetz reflects neo-Ebionite assumptions: Jesus born of Joseph and his wife Miriam (148); his death was due to the Romans and not the ‘Sanhedrion’ (164-5), although he made many enemies for himself (161-2); the resurrection was a legend (168); Jesus never claimed to be divine (159).
- Regarding previous Jewish views, Graetz describes the *Toledoth Yeshu* as a “wretched patchwork”

Christianity owed its origin to an overpowering, mysterious feeling which reigned among the better classes of the Judean nation, and which became daily stronger as their political position became more and more intolerable. The ever-recurring evils brought on them by the rapacity of their Roman rulers, the shamelessness of the Herodian princes, the cowardice and servility of the Judean aristocracy, the debasement of the high priests and their families, and the dissensions of rival parties, has raised the longing for the deliverer announced in the prophetic writings – the Messiah – to so great a pitch that any highly-gifted individual, possessed of outward charm or imbued with moral and religious grace, would readily have found disciples, and believers in his Messianic mission.

[p.142]

Jesus (short for Joshua), born in Nazareth, a small town in Lower Galilee, to the south of Sepphoris, was the eldest son of an otherwise unknown carpenter, Joseph, and his wife Miriam or Mary, who bore him four more sons, Jacob, Jose, Judah, and Simon, and several daughter. Whether Joseph or Mary, the father and mother of Jesus, belonged to the family of David cannot be proved.

[p.148]

On account of his Galilean origin, Jesus could not have stood high in that knowledge of the Law which, through the schools of Shammai and Hillel, had become prevalent in Judea... His deficiency in knowledge, however, was fully compensated for by his intensely sympathetic character. High-minded earnestness and spotless moral purity were his undeniable attributes; they stand out in all the authentic accounts of his life

that have reached us, and even in those garbled teachings which his followers placed in his mouth... Like Hillel, Jesus looked upon the promotion of peace and the forgiveness of injuries as the highest forms of virtue. His whole being was permeated by that deeper religiousness which consecrates to God not only the hour of prayer... but of every step in the journey of life... He was filled with tender brotherly love, which Judaism also teaches towards an enemy, and had reached the ideal of the passive virtues which the Pharisees inculcated: "Count yourself among the oppressed and not among the oppressors, receive abuse and return it not; do all from love to God, and rejoice in suffering." [BT Sabbath 88b]
[p.149-50]

Jesus must, from the idiosyncrasies of his nature, have been powerfully attracted by the Essenes, who led a contemplative life apart from the world and its vanities. When John the Baptist – or more correctly the Essene – invited all to come and receive baptism in the Jordan, to repent and prepare for the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus hastened to obey the call and was baptized by him. Although it cannot be proved that Jesus was formally admitted into the order of the Essenes, much in his life and work can only be explained by the supposition that he had adopted their fundamental principles. Like the Essenes, Jesus highly esteemed self-inflicted poverty, and despised the mammon of riches. The following proverbs, ascribed to him, appear to bear his stamp: "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven" (Luke vi. 20). "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew xix. 24). "No man can serve two masters, ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew vi. 24). Jesus shared the aversion of the Essenes to marriage: "It is not good to marry" (Matthew xix.11). Community of goods, a peculiar doctrine of the Essenes, was not only approved of, but positively enjoined by Jesus; like them, he also reprobated every form of oath. "Swear not at all" (so Jesus taught), "neither by heaven nor by the earth, nor by your head – but let your yea be yea, and nay be nay" (James v.12). Miraculous cures, said to have been performed by him – such as the exorcism of demons from those who believed themselves to be possessed – were often made by the Essenes, so to say, in a professional capacity.
[pp.150-151]

Jesus made no attack upon Judaism itself, he had no idea of becoming the reformer of Jewish doctrine or the propounder of a new law; he sought merely to redeem the sinner, to call him to a good and holy life, to teach him that he is a child of God, and to prepare him for the approaching Messianic time. He insisted upon the unity of God, and was far from attempting to change in the slightest degree the Jewish conception of the Deity... He must have kept the Sabbath holy, for those of his followers who were attached to Judaism strictly observed the Sabbath, which they would not have done had their master disregarded it. It was only the Shammaitic strictness in the observance of the Sabbath, which forbade even the healing of the sick on that day, that Jesus protested against, declaring that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Jesus made no objection to the existing custom of sacrifice, he merely demanded – and in this the Pharisees agreed with him – that reconciliation with one's fellow-man should precede any act of religious atonement. Even fasting found no opponent in him, so far as it was practised without ostentation or hypocrisy. He wore on his garments the fringes ordered by the Law...
[pp.155-156]

The merit of Jesus consists especially in his efforts to impart greater inner force to the precepts of Judaism, in the enthusiasm with which he obeyed them himself, in his ardour to made the Judaeans turn to God with filial love as children to their father, in his fervent upholding of the brotherhood of men, in his insistence that moral laws be placed in the foreground, and in his endeavors to have them accepted by those who had been hitherto regarded as the lowest and most degraded of human beings.
[p.156]

It was not to be expected, however, that through his teaching alone Jesus could attract devoted followers, or achieve great results; something more was required – something strange and wonderful to startle and inflame. His appearance, his mystical character, his earnest zeal produced, doubtless, a powerful effect, but to awaken in the dull and cold a lasting enthusiasm, to gain the confidence of the masses and to kindle their faith, it was necessary to appeal to their imagination by strange circumstances and marvellous surroundings. The Christian chronicles abound in extraordinary events and descriptions of miraculous cures performed by Jesus.
[p.156]

His Great design, the secret desire of his heart, Jesus disclosed on one occasion to the most intimate circle of his disciples... Simon Peter answered and said "Thou art the Christ." Jesus praised Peter's discernment and admitted that he was the Messiah, but forbade his disciples from divulging the truth or, for the present, speaking of it at all. Such was the mysteriously-veiled birth of Christianity... Jesus never publicly called himself the Messiah, but made use of other expressions which were doubtless current among the Essenes. He spoke of himself as 'the Son of Man', alluding probably to Daniel vii.13, "One like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days," a verse which referred probably to the whole people and its Messianic future, but which at the time was made to point to the Messiah himself. There was yet one other name which Jesus applied to himself in his Messianic character – the mysterious words, "Son of God", probably taken from the seventh verse of the second Psalm, "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee." Was this expression used by Jesus figuratively, or did he wish it to be taken in a literal sense? As far as we know, he never explained himself clearly on that subject, not even at a later date, when it was on account of the meaning attached to those words that he was undergoing his trial.

[pp.158-159]

Prejudice certainly existed against him [Jesus] in the capital [Jerusalem]. The educated classes could not imagine the Messiah's saving work to be performed by an unlearned Galilean; indeed, the idea that the Messiah, who was expected to come from Bethlehem, out of the branch of David, should belong to Galilee, overthrew the long-cherished conviction of centuries. It is probably from this time that the proverb arose: "Can there be any good thing that comes out of Nazareth?" (John I.46). The devout took offence at his going about eating and drinking with sinners, publicans, and women of a degraded class. Even the Essenes, John's disciples, were displeased at his infringement of rules and customs. The Shammaites were scandalized at his healing the sick on the Sabbath day, and could not recognize the Messiah in one who desecrated the Sabbath. He also aroused the opposition of the Pharisees by the disapproval he expressed here and there of their interpretations of the laws, and of the conclusions they drew from them. From Jesus the zealots could not look for deeds of heroism, for, instead of inspiring his followers with hatred of Rome, he advocated peace, and in his contempt for mammon admonished them to submit willingly to the Roman tax-gatherers. "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's" (Matt.xxii.21). These startling peculiarities, which seemed to contradict the preconceived idea of the Messianic character, caused the higher and the learned classes to be coldly indifferent to him, and it is certain that he met with no friendly reception in Jerusalem.

[pp.161-2]

That Pilate on the contrary found Jesus innocent and wished to save him, while the Judaeans had determined upon putting him to death, is unhistorical and merely legendary. When Jesus was scoffed at and obliged to wear the crown of thorns in ironical allusion to the Messianic and royal dignity he had assumed, it was not the Judaeans who inflicted those indignities upon him, but the Roman soldiers, who sought through him to deride the Judaeans.

[p.164]

That Jesus was scourged before his execution proves that he was treated according to the Roman penal laws; for by the Judaeans no one sentenced to death could suffer flagellation. It was consequently the Roman lictors who maliciously scourged with fagots or ropes the self-styled King of the Judaeans. They also caused Jesus (by the order of Pilate) to be nailed to the cross, and to suffer the shameful death awarded by the law of Rome. For after the verdict of death was pronounced by the Roman authorities, the condemned prisoner belonged no more to his own nation, but to the Roman state. It was not the Synhedrion [sic] but Pilate that gave the order for the execution of one who was regarded as a State criminal and a cause of disturbance and agitation.

[p.165]

This belief [of Jesus' disciples in the coming Messianic Kingdom] required the further conviction that Jesus had not fallen a prey to death, but that he would rise again. It may have been the biblical story of Jonah's entombment for three days in the bowels of a fish which gave rise to the legend that Jesus after the same interval came forth from his sepulchre, which was found to be empty. Many of his disciples declared they had seen him after his death, now in one place, now in another; that they had spoken to him, had marked his wounds, and had even partaken of fish and honey with him. Nothing seemed to stagger their faith in the Messianic character of Jesus; but greatly as they venerated and glorified him, they had not yet raised him

above humanity; in spite of the enthusiasm which he inspired them, they could not look upon him as God. They regarded him only as a highly gifted man who, having obeyed the Law more completely than any other human being, had been found worthy to be the Messiah of the Lord.
[p.168]

Abraham Geiger (1810-1874)

Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, vol. I (New York: Thalmessinger & Cahn, 1866) trans. by Maurice Mayer from the German original *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (3 vols, 1865–71).

Geiger's background: Leading German Reform rabbi and scholar, born into a distinguished family in Frankfurt. Radically opposed to Orthodoxy, which he regarded as fossilised by legalism and unattractive to modern cultured Jews, he aimed to lead Jewry to a kind of assimilation which would enable the Jewish 'mission' to spread rational faith in the One God and His moral law. Geiger set out to eliminate from Judaism every mark of national uniqueness and of dissociation from the gentile nations. But because he wanted to avoid a sudden split in Judaism, and because of his desire to distinguish Judaism clearly from Christianity, his practical reforms were not as radical as others'. Geiger was a founder member of the Academy for the Scientific Study of Judaism (Hochschule fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums), which was established in Berlin in 1872 and which he directed until his death. This became effectively a reform rabbinical training college, offering university-level courses in Judaism and Jewish history which were not then available elsewhere.

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus was a Pharisaic messianic claimant. He was influenced by the apocalyptic times and convinced himself and his disciples that he was the messiah who would bring about a new era, the 'world to come', just as others have believed during periods of oppression (214-5). He can be distinguished from the Pharisees by his pessimism and his contempt for material life and the joys of the world, which was the result of a diseased age (Roman oppression?) (218-9). He did not regard himself as divine (332).

Jesus and the Law: Jesus basically affirmed the eternal validity of the Law, and did not expect it to pass away. He did not abandon national or legal Judaism (332). He was not always entirely consistent; he regarded certain ceremonial observances as hindrances (216).

The Question of Originality: Jesus offered no new teachings (215-6), but the many noble teachings he expounded were adopted from earlier Jewish teaching (333). One possible exception was 'If anyone takes away your coat, let him have your cloak also', which Geiger regards as impractical (219).

Comments:

- Geiger did not regard apocalypticism as authentically Jewish, in contrast to the Pharisees who, as Jewish liberalizers, were the spiritual ancestors of Reform Jews.
- Geiger was concerned to 'reverse the theological gaze' (Susannah Heschel): to counter the Christian critique of Judaism by presenting Christianity as a tangential off-shoot of Judaism rather than as the fulfilment of a flawed Judaism.
- Jesus was of interest as a Jewish ethical teacher. Three of Geiger's lectures in *Judaism and its History* focused on Jesus and his disciples.
- Geiger wanted the study of Judaism to be incorporated into university studies. He argued that the rabbinic literature was essential for understanding the New Testament, and he condemned Christian scholars whose ignorance was compounded by their desire to portray Judaism negatively (340-3).

It was then that a man again appeared in Galilee who, still more confidently, gave shape to the commotion of the times; while others before him merely counselled preparation for the Heavenly Kingdom, promising that it would come – that a son of man wrapt in the clouds of heaven would appear – that a complete reformation would take place; while others represented themselves merely as prophets and proclaimers of this belief, bearing in their imagination that hope without giving it shape, he had the courage and confidence to state: – This time *is* fulfilled, the Heavenly Kingdom *is* come, and the son of man wrapt in the clouds of heaven – at first he did not distinctly utter it, but he bore this belief within him and suffered it to be manifest – "this son of man is no other than myself." It was not his mission to carry on a struggle against the kingdom of this world; the words attributed to him by a later narrator, "My kingdom is not of this world," may have fully corresponded with his belief. It means: My kingdom does not begin in this heathen world; but this world

will soon have tumbled into ruins, and then the future world shall appear, actually and tangibly, and then my kingdom also shall commence. He was fully convinced thereof, and in all later times of deep oppression we meet with men who presented themselves with the same self-assurance as Messiahs. Should we perchance wonder that, at this time of general suspense, a bold and glowing enthusiasm for Judaism and its reign at large could completely possess an aspiring man – that he could be filled with the belief himself – and that this belief vested him with the courage to utter such hopes with the fullest assurance? It was this that animated the first author of Christianity.

[pp.214-215]

He was a Jew, a Pharisean Jew with Galilean coloring – a man who joined in the hopes of his time, and who believed that these hopes were fulfilled in him. He did by no means utter a new thought; nor did he break down the barriers of nationality. When a strange woman came to him with the request to heal her, he said: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to the dogs.” He did not repeal the smallest tittle of Judaism; he was a Pharisee who walked in the way of Hillel; though he did not set the most decided value upon every single external form, he yet proclaimed on the other hand, “that not the least tittle should be taken from the Law;” “the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat, and whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.” It is true that, if the accounts are faithful, he allowed himself to be carried away to trifling expressions concerning one subject or another, when he was opposed; but he never faltered in his original conviction.

[pp.215-216]

If Jesus’ utterances concerning the purely moral relations of men to each other are indeed faithfully reported, they either present nothing new, or whatever is new bears such a diseased character as belongs to a diseased age. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” was the utterance upon which the Pharisee replied: “Master, thou hast well answered.” [Mark 12:28-34] But Jesus is also said to have praised poverty and taught contempt of the world and of everything that proceeds from this world; - to have repudiated cheerful participation in the affairs of the world. These doctrines, indeed, are not taught by Pharisaism; on the contrary, it establishes this principle: “This world is an ante-chamber for the future; prepare thyself well in the ante-chamber, that thou mayest appear well prepared in the reception room” “One hour in the future world is sweeter than all enjoyments in this, but also one hour in this world spent in the stud of Law and the performance of good deeds, is better than all the pleasures in the future.” [Abot 4] ... If even pretended morality means to suppress every feeling of justice – if the doctrine should obtain: “Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” – thou shalt not only suffer but even divest thyself of all honour; and again: “if anyone should take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also,” if this be the new doctrine proclaimed by Jesus – *Jesus*, such was the name of the author of Christianity... then it is the fruit of an age in contradiction with itself, which perverts all order and destroys all notions of right; or it is the result of a transfer of a future, completely different world into that on this side of the grave.

[pp.218-220]

Thus it is entirely out of place to represent him as believing in his divine sonship, in an eminent sense of the term, or that of the Messiah as *logos* [word], and above all, it is mystification to attribute to him the character of a universal God-man as taught by the Hegelian School. The theory that he abandoned national and legal Judaism must likewise be rejected in all respect, and solely ascribed to a later evolution. Nor can the nobler religious and moral opinions and doctrines which are placed in his mouth and heart – though we should attribute them to him and acknowledge their excellence with the necessary qualifications – be regarded as his own in this sense, that he was their author, that he was the first who entertained and proclaimed them, but, at the utmost, that he adopted them, appropriated them to himself as he found them in works of an earlier date.

[pp.332-333]

This phenomenon, that men [the New Testament scholars Rénan and Strauss] who are as highly praised on one side, as they are condemned on the other, for their religious liberality, are so little familiar with a branch of science [the study of the rabbinic literature] which is indispensable to them for a scientific examination of their subject, and still adhere with a certain tenacity to antiquated prejudices, is in many respects very unpleasant.

[p.342]

Israel Abrahams (1858-1924)

Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1st series 1917 and 2nd series 1923).

Abrahams' background: Anglo-Jewish scholar of rabbinic and Talmudic literature at Jews' College London and Cambridge. Despite an Orthodox upbringing he sympathized with extreme Reform and was not only involved in the Jewish Religious Union (1902), which aimed to attract Jews who had lost interest in religion, but was a frequent lay-preacher and supporter of the LJS (1910), which set itself in opposition to both Orthodoxy and Reform. A friend of and collaborator with Montefiore, he was also anti-Zionist, adopted biblical criticism, and was a staunch defender of Judaism and Talmud against Christian critique. He was regarded as the chief proponent of Jewish scholarship in Britain during his lifetime and was certainly one of the most influential Jewish writers in his day. Along with his *Studies in Pharisaism*, he is well known for his *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (1896).

Categorizing Jesus: It is difficult to place Jesus into any category; he was not simply Essenic or apocalyptic, he appears anti-Sadducean and has prophetic tendencies (1st series 16). Jesus' teaching are most easily compared to the Pharisees and/or Rabbis e.g. parables (1st series 90-91), even when they *appear* to differ e.g. 'You have heard it said...'
(1st series 16-17).

Jesus and the Law: Jesus criticised abuses of the system and externalism but did not attack the system itself e.g. he over-turned the money-sellers but did not condemn visitors to the temple (1st series 87-88). Other disputes should not be used to compare the Pharisees unfavourably with Jesus (2nd series 4) e.g. healing on the Sabbath, where Jesus did not stress its sanctity to the same degree (1st series 134-5).

The Question of Originality: Jesus' initiative to approach the sinner (1st series 58). Generally, teachings such as the Lord's Prayer are not original, although the condition regarding forgiveness in Matthew's version has no Jewish parallels (2nd series 97-8). Jesus' method of teaching parables was not original (1st series 90-1). Jesus did not necessarily have a unique sense of authority (1st series 16-17).

Comments:

- Abrahams was more concerned about Jesus' teaching than about his biography and provides no material for a 'life of Jesus'. A civil tone is characteristic throughout; he rarely cites Jesus so as to criticise him.
- Abrahams aimed to refute the assumptions of Christian NT scholarship, such as the expansion of Jesus' criticism of abuses to the Judaic system (1st series 87), or Jesus opposition to Pharisees (2nd series 4).
- Abrahams' primary concern was to defend the Pharisees and thereby Orthodoxy (2nd series 13). He has a whole chapter on the Yolk of the Law (2nd series).

The view that Jesus was an original eclectic... is confirmed by the difficulty of "placing" Jesus with regard to the schools of his age... It is undeniable that certain features of his teaching are Essenic. But he did not share the Essenic devotion to ceremonial ablutions. Further, he was an Apocalyptic, but he was also a powerful advocate of the Prophetic Judaism. Then, again, it is plausible to explain much of the gospel attack on the Scribes as due to contempt of the Sadducean priesthood.

[*Studies* 1st Series, p.16]

It is sometimes thought that the teaching with authority is shown by Jesus' frequent phrase "but I say unto you" (J. Weisse on Mk i. 21). But this use of the phrase needs interpretation. The most interesting passage in which it occurs is Mt. v. 43-4: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy, but I say unto you, Love your enemies." Now it is obvious that nowhere in the O[ld] T[estament] are men told to hate their enemies. But in the exegetical terminology of R. Ishmael (end of first century) there is a constantly recurring phrase which runs thus: "The text reads so and so. I *hear* from it so and so: *but* other texts prove that this is not its true meaning"... If this, as Schechter (*Studies in Judaism*) suggests... underlies the passage just cited from Matthew, then Jesus' phrase: "Ye have *heard*... but I say unto you" would be parallel to the Rabbinic idiom. It removes the main difficulty in regard to the hating of ones' enemy, for Jesus would not be referring to any text enjoining hatred, but to a possible narrowing of the meaning of the text enjoining love [by his listeners]. In that case, Jesus' "but I say unto you" differs from the usual Rabbinical formula in that it introduces a personal element, but as with them, Jesus' exegesis really leads up to the citation and interpretation of another text (in this case: "Ye shall be perfect a your heavenly

father is perfect”⁴) which takes a wider sweep and illumines the particular matter under discussion. This is in full conformity with the Rabbinic method. They, too, derived the ideal of man’s character from the character of God. “Be ye holy for I the Lord am holy” (Leviticus xix. 2, of which the turn in Matthew is a reminiscence) was with the Rabbis the ground text of the idea of the *Imitation of God*. It was with them the highest motive for lovingkindness and charity. (Sifra on Levit. xix. 2).
 [Studies 1st Series, pp.16-17]

There was in the Pharisaism of all ages a real anxiety to make the return of the sinner easy. It was inclined to leave the initiative to the sinner, except that it always maintained *God’s* readiness to take the first step. Jesus in his attitude towards sin and sinners was more inclined to take the initiative.
 [Studies 1st Series, p.58]

The danger always lies in this tendency to confuse a system with its abuses. This, as it seems to me, is an error made by many commentators on the Gospels, who seek to expand the often-enough just criticism of Jesus against abuses, into an unjust condemnation of the whole Pharisaic system. It is fair enough for the anti-Nomists to criticise and judge Pharisaism as a religion based on Law; but there is no justice in refusing to consider the legalistic point of view and its possible merits. Still less is it fair to confuse legalism with externalism, or to assume without close examination of each instance that the moral abuses, which seem superficially inherent in a legalistic system, were really the logical result of the system, or did actually occur in Pharisaism as lived by those who believed and rejoined in it.... The Cleansing of the Temple is a good case in point... “Externalism needs the most careful watching and ritual is always in need of freshening under the inspiration of the ideas which lie behind it. But Pharisaism was not ritualism. I, and many Jews with me, have no resentment whatever against the general spirit of the criticism to which the Law was subjected by Jesus, against his healthy onslaught against externalism. When Jesus overturned the money-changers and ejected the sellers of doves from the Temple he did a service to Judaism... But were the money-changers and the dove-sellers the only people who visited the Temple? And was everyone who bought or sold a dove a mere formalist?
 [Studies 1st Series, pp.87-88]

It is generally felt that Jesus was not the originator of the method of teaching by Parables... Jesus had no need to take his Parables from other Agadists, just as other Agadists had no need to take their Parables from Jesus... There must have been a large Jewish stock of fables and parables floating about long before they were set down in writing... and it is possible that both the Tannaim and Evangelists drew from the stock.
 [Studies 1st Series, pp.90-91]

All things considered, it would seem that Jesus differed fundamentally from the Pharisees in that he asserted a general right to abrogate the Sabbath law for man’s ordinary convenience, while the Rabbis limited the licence to cases of danger to life... [T]he real difference lay in the limitation assigned by the Pharisees, according to whom all labour, not pressing and postponable, was forbidden on the Sabbath. That this is the true explanation is confirmed by the cases of healing, and is indeed forcibly suggested in Luke xiii. 14: “There are six days in which men ought to work, in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the day of the Sabbath.” And this argument of the ruler of the synagogue remains unanswered; it is regrettable that the Synoptics do not in other cases present the Pharisaic case so precisely. Pharisaism speaks with no uncertain voice, and it is the voice of moderation and humanity... Jesus, however, traverses the Pharisaic position, in that he had no objection to treat long-standing diseases, lingering maladies, and in general cases where the treatment could be postponed without fear of dangerous consequences. Jesus concedes, nay his argument is based on the assertion that the Pharisees would permit the relief of an animal’s distress on the Sabbath – indeed the principle was laid down in various places... But Jesus went further. No act of mercy, whether the need pressed or not, was to be intermitted because of the Sabbath. This is an intelligible position, but the Pharisaic position was as intelligible, and it was consonant with the whole idea of the Sabbath rest. For there are many categories of acts, clearly servile, and yet which might be brought within the definition of the merciful, thus first invading, and finally destroying, the day set aside for repose and communion with God. The Pharisees permitted, nay required, the performance of all necessary works of mercy, but refused to extend the licence too indiscriminately, and never reconciled themselves to the theory that in general the performance of a duty justified the infringement of a prohibition.
 [Studies 1st Series, pp.134-135]

Jesus indeed was animated by a strong, one may even say a unique, sense of his own relation to and unbroken intercourse with God. But this sense of nearness is weakened for all other men when the intercourse with God is broken by the intrusion between them and God of the person of Jesus.

[*Studies 1st Series*, pp.142]

[Regarding Matt. 11:28-30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”]

Are the modern commentaries right in reading into it an attack on the Pharisees? Was Jesus never thinking of anything else but his immediate opponents? *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light* is usually taken as an implied censure of the difficult yoke and heavy burden of the Rabbinical law. But must every saying of the Gospels be treated as controversial? Does a “scientific criticism” really demand such a method of interpretation? Ought we, by introducing the disturbing irritant of polemics, distort the serene pathos of the passage before us? Must the comfort that it has brought to so many afflicted souls be won at the cost of afflicting the souls of so many others?

[*Studies 2nd Series*, p.4]

[Regarding the yoke of the law]

Burden, weight, are psychological as well as physical concepts. When Jacob served seven years for Rachel, “they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her” (Gen. xxix.10). In the same way, with the Pharisee, the Torah became ever more the object of Israel’s affection. On Israel’s side, service was the token of love, on God’s side the opportunity of service was a precious gift, bestowed as a loving privilege.

[*Studies 2nd Series*, p.13]

Liturgically, however, the synagogue did not make man’s repentance a precise *condition* of God’s pardon. Still less did it make man’s forgiveness a condition... On the whole no Jew feels himself out of sympathy with the [Lord’s] Prayer except with regard to the condition regarding forgiveness apparently imposed in Matthew’s form, which has no Jewish liturgical parallel whatever. It is not here suggested that, on a valuation of significance, Matthew is higher or lower than the Jewish sentiment. But he is not at the same standpoint.

[*Studies 2nd Series*, pp.97-98]

Joseph Klausner (1874-1956)

Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth; His Life, Times, and Teaching* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1925) trans. by Herbert Danby from Joseph Klausner, *Yeshu Ha-Notzri* (Jerusalem: Shtibel, 5682/1922).

Klausner’s background: Orthodox historian and Zionist. Born near Vilna, Lithuania, he studied in Germany. In 1897 he attended the first Zionist Congress (Basle) and following the Bolshevik Revolution (October 1917) he emigrated from Odessa, Russia, to Palestine. From 1925 he taught Modern Hebrew literature and the History of the Second Temple Period at Hebrew University. He became increasingly nationalist in his Zionist views and was the ideologue of the Revisionist Party, which from the 1920s and 30s was the principal opposition to Weizmann’s leadership and the strategy of the World Zionist Organization which was regarded as too cautious. His historical writings on Jesus and Christian beginnings were the first such comprehensive treatments in Hebrew; in addition to *Jesus of Nazareth* (HT 1922, ET 1925) he wrote *From Jesus to Paul* (HT 1939 ET 1943).

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus was a kind of mystic visionary (173), a product of Palestine alone (363). Jesus was not a messiah, or prophet, or lawgiver, or founder of new religion, or tanna or Pharisaic rabbi (413-4). He failed to appreciate the positive aspect of Pharisaic teaching, and tended to oppose them (413-4), but is best explained in terms of scriptural and Pharisaic Judaism (363). He did regard himself as the messiah (378-9).

Jesus and the Law: While Jesus never intended to set aside the Law (367), his teaching contained ‘a kernel of opposition to Judaism’, a breaking through the barriers of nationalism. He disregarded ritual separatism (eats with sinners), lightly esteems Sabbath observance (heals diseases which were not dangerous and allows his disciples to pluck corn), which would allow Paul to break away from Judaism (369-70). Klausner accepted that Pharisaism could be criticised for over-emphasising the relations between God and man at the expense of man and fellow-man (215-6).

The Question of Originality: Jesus' knowledge was primarily of the Scripture and from the primitive Palestinian Haggada and Midrash (363,384). His teachings are often impractical for civil justice, culture, family life (373). Jesus' 'exaggerated Judaism' or idealism is deplorable as dangerous for national Jewish life (374,392-3). Despite Jesus' nationalist instinct, he brought about non-Judaism – in this sense, from a nationalist perspective, he became a 'Christian' (413-4). His ethical teachings have no parallel in any other Hebrew ethical code (388-9), and the artistry of his parables is unparalleled. He popularised ethical ideas (413-4). His unique influence was due to his character (410-11).

Comments:

- Klausner was concerned to assess Jesus from a nationalist perspective, to consider his meaning for the modern Jewish nation (413-4). He claims Jesus as a 'great teacher and an artist in parable' and a great moralist (413-4). One day the Book of the Ethics of Jesus, stripped of miracles and mysticism, might be one of 'the choicest treasures in the literature of Israel for all time' (413-4). Reclamation for Jewish national history?
- Klausner's comprehensive compilation of all relevant Jewish sources on Jesus includes Talmudic and mediaeval traditional sources which he assesses as "valueless" for the historical context of Jesus' life and teaching. Christian scholarship does not affect him.
- Jews reject Jesus because Jesus' Jewish outlook was subsumed by his concern for the individual, which led to a loss of reality and an over-emphasis on self-abnegation, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and also because Jesus betrayed nationalism (373-4).
- Despite his Orthodoxy and Zionism, Klausner's work was still regarded by many as a "trucking and kow-towing to the Christian religion and an assertion of great affection for the foggy figure of its founder, a denial of the healthy sense of our saintly forefathers." (A. Kaminka, *Ha-Toren* Aug 1922).
- Christianity, to Klausner, was a combination of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy (363). He sees Paul as responsible for making a Jewish Jesus the origin of Christianity and there are hints throughout of his hostility to Christianity (395).

In Galilee there were to found neither Pharisees learned in the Law nor Sadduceans, nor any of the richer and more powerful classes who acquiesced in Roman domination; there remained only two dissimilar types: the Zealots... and the "meek upon the earth" and the many varieties of the mystic visionary type – "quietist Pharisees", Essenes and the like... who abandoned interest in temporal things to dream of a future life, a life based on the ethics of the Prophets and the messianic idea... It was from these circles of the "meek" that Jesus and his new teaching sprung.

[p.173]

It must, however, be admitted that Pharisaism did, in truth, contain one serious defect which enabled the more hypocritical to pride themselves in the mere performance of the commandments, and which justified Jesus' fighting against it qua Jew, and even qua Pharisee; for though Jesus may not have been wholly a Pharisee he was, like any 'Rab' or teacher of those days, much more of a Pharisee than a Sadducee... This defect was that the Pharisees attached almost as much importance to those commandments dealing with the relation between man and God as to those dealing with the relations between man and his fellow-man... Hence the Pharisees were far more concerned with the discussion of *Halakha*, with those commandments dealing with man's relations to God, than with the others, because the latter seemed to them far more self-evident and simple.

[p.215-216]

Jesus derived his entire knowledge and point of view from the Scriptures and from a few, at most, of the Palestinian *apocryphal* and *pseudepigraphical* writings and from the Palestinian *Haggada* [sic] and *Midrash* in the primitive form in which they were then current among the Jews. *Christianity*, it must always be remembered, is the result of a combination of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy; it cannot be understood without a knowledge of Jewish-Greek (Alexandrine) literature and of contemporary Graeco-Roman culture. *Jesus of Nazareth*, however, was a product of Palestine alone, a product of Judaism unaffected by any foreign admixture. There were many Gentiles in Galilee, but Jesus was in no way influenced by them. In his days, Galilee was the stronghold of the most enthusiastic Jewish patriotism... Without any exception he is wholly explainable by the scriptural and Pharisaic Judaism of his time.

[p.363]

"Woe to you Pharisees! For ye tithe mint and rue and every herb and pass over judgement and the love of

God: but these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone.” [Luke xi.42]. This verse... proves in the strongest possible fashion that never did Jesus think of annulling the Law (or even the ceremonial laws which it contained) and setting up a new law of his own.

[p.367]

Had not Jesus’ teaching contained a kernel of opposition to Judaism, Paul could never *in the name of Jesus* have set aside the ceremonial laws, and broken through the barriers of national Judaism. There can be no doubt that in Jesus Paul found justifying support... Jesus eats and drinks with publicans and sinners, thereby disregarding ritual separatism and the principle of clean and unclean even to the extent to which they were accepted by the “sages” at the close of the Second Temple period. Jesus, on the Sabbath, heals diseases which are not dangerous. Jesus justifies his disciples when they pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath, thereby lightly esteeming the laws of Sabbath observance... In other words, [for Jesus] whatever change there is must be fundamental and not gradual or partial – not as with the Pharisees... As opposed to the *Tannaim* who taught, “Look not at the vessel but at what is contained therein: a new vessel may be full of old wine” [Aboth IV.20], Jesus taught that new wine must be contained in a new bottle. Matthew [xiii.44-52] preserves a noteworthy passage to this effect.

[p. 369-70]

Civil justice, state efforts at reform of debased social conditions, would be impossible when one must “resist no evil” and when, if struck on the left cheek, the only response is to stretch out the right cheek also! How can the state endure if Jesus requires that a man “swear not all”? What culture can there be in the world when Jesus ordains that man shall share all his goods with the poor and teaches that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven?” Even family life must break down for one who would be a true disciple of Jesus, since the Messiah accounts praiseworthy those “which make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake.”

How can family affairs be righted if Jesus forbids the divorce of the wife on any ground whatsoever [“save only for fornication” – conforming with the School of Shammai: “except he have found in her a matter of lewdness” – being only a later interpolation]? What interest has he in labour, in culture, in economic or political achievements, who recommends us to be as “the lilies of the field which toil not neither do they spin” but whose apparel is more glorious than that of king Solomon, or like the ravens whose mother birds are careless of their young, but the Holy One, blessed be He, supplies them with food without their labour or care...

In all this Jesus is the most Jewish of Jews, more Jewish than Simeon ben Shetah, more Jewish even than Hillel. Yet nothing is more dangerous to national Judaism than this *exaggerated* Judaism; it is the ruin of national culture, the national state, and national life. Where there is no call for the enactment of laws, for justice, for national statecraft, where belief in God and the practice of an extreme and one-sided ethic is in itself enough – there we have the negation of national life and of the national state.

[pp.373-374]

Jesus, however, makes far more use of such expressions as ‘Father’, ‘My Father’, ‘My Father in heaven’, than do the Pharisees and *Tannaim*; and often when he employs it, it receives an *excessive* emphasis. The reason is plain. From the day when he was baptised by John, Jesus looked upon himself as the Messiah, and as the Messiah he was closer to God than was any other human being. On the other hand, as Messiah he is “the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven” and “drawing near to the Ancient of Days” [Daniel vii.13]; thus literally, he is near to the Godhead... Such a conception of the messianic title “son of God”, signifying that he is nearest to God of all men (a fundamentally Jewish conception [i.e. Tzaddiq]), Judaism was unable to accept [i.e. exaggerating the idea might induce an idolatrous belief in Jesus as the advocate for man before God]. Jesus’ own teaching is poles apart from the Trinitarian doctrine; but it contained the germ which, fostered by gentile Christians, developed into the doctrine of the Trinity.

[p.378-379]

[Regarding the Sermon on the Mount]

Not all of those sayings may have been uttered by Jesus, but they are all in accordance with his spirit and they are all of distinct originality. Yet, with Geiger and with Graetz, we can aver, without laying ourselves open to the charge of subjectivity and without any desire to argue in defence of Judaism, that *throughout the Gospels there is not one item of ethical teaching which cannot be paralleled either in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, or in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature of the period near to the time of Jesus.*

[384]

So extraordinary is the similarity that it might almost seem as though the Gospels were composed simply and solely out of matter contained in the Talmud and Midrash... But there is a new thing in the Gospels... Jesus gathered together and, so to speak, condensed and concentrated ethical teachings in such a fashion as to make them more prominent than in the Talmudic Haggada and the Midrashim, where they are interspaced among more commonplace discussion and worthless matter... A man like Jesus, for whom the ethical ideal was everything, was something hitherto unheard of in the Judaism of the day.

[388-389]

Judaism also knows the ideal of love for the enemy, and exemplifies it in the law dealing with an enemy's ox or ass and in the ethical teaching of the Book of Jonah; but Judaism never emphasised it to such a degree that it ultimately became too high an ideal for ordinary mankind, and even too high for the man of more than average moral calibre... Everything which Jesus ever uttered of this nature is Jewish ethical teaching, too; but his *overemphasis* was *not* Judaism, and, in fact, brought about non-Judaism.

[392-393]

"Christian morality" was embodied in daily life by – Judaism: it is Judaism and Judaism only which has never produced murderers and pogrom-mongers, whereas indulgence and forgiveness have become the prime feature in its being, with the result that the Jews have been made moral (not in theory but in living fact) to the verge of abject flaccidity.

[p.395]

These two extremes, extreme kindness of heart and the most violent passion, show in him a character akin to that of the Prophet – save only that he had not the wide political perspective of the Prophets, nor their gift of divine consolation to the nation. However that may be, these two contradictory attitudes are the sign of the great man. Only such a man, mighty in forgiveness and equally mighty in reproof, could exert so ineffaceable an influence on all who came in contact with him... The *complete* visionary and mystic exerts an influence only upon other visionaries like himself, and his influence soon passes... Only where mystic faith is yoked with practical prudence does there follow a strong, enduring result. And of such a nature was the influence exerted by Jesus of Nazareth upon his followers, and, through them, upon succeeding generations. Such is the force of Jesus' influence. The contradictory traits in his character, its positive and negative aspects, his harshness and his gentleness, his clear vision combined with his cloudy visionariness – all these united to make him a force and an influence, for which history has never yet afforded a parallel.

[pp.410-411]

"Jesus was not a Christian," but he *became* a Christian. His teaching and his history have been severed from Israel... [F]rom the *national Hebrew* standpoint it is more difficult to appraise the value of Jesus. In spite of the fact that he himself was undoubtedly a "nationalist" Jew by instinct and even an extreme nationalist – as we may see from his retort to the Canaanitish [sic] woman, from his depreciatory way of referring to "the heathen and the publican," from the terms "Son of Abraham," "Daughter of Abraham" (which he uses as terms of the highest possible commendation), from his deep love for Jerusalem and from his devoting himself so entirely to the cause of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" – in spite of all this, there was in him something out of which arose "non-Judaism."

What is Jesus to the *Jewish nation* at the present day? To the Jewish nation he can be neither God nor the Son of God, in the sense conveyed by belief in the Trinity. Either conception is to the Jew not only impious and blasphemous, but incomprehensible. Neither can he, to the Jewish nation, be the Messiah: the kingdom of heaven (the "Days of the Messiah") is not yet come. Neither can they regard him as a Prophet: he lacks the Prophet's political perception and the Prophet's spirit of national consolation in the political-national sense.

Neither can they regard him as a lawgiver or the founder of a new religion: he did not even desire to be such. Neither is he a "*Tanna*," or Pharisaic rabbi: he nearly always ranged himself in opposition to the Pharisees and did not apprehend the positive side in their work, the endeavour to take within their scope the entire national life and to strengthen the national existence.

But Jesus is, for the Jewish nation, *a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable*. He is *the* moralist for whom, in the religious life, morality counts as – everything. Indeed, as a consequence of this extremist standpoint his ethical code has become simply and ideal for the isolated few... and ideal for "the days of the

Messiah,” when an “end” shall have been made of the “old world,” this present social order. It is no ethical code for the nations and the social order of to-day, when men are still trying to find the way to that future of the Messiah and the Prophets, and to the “kingdom of the Almighty” spoken of by the *Talmud*, and ideal which is of “this world” and which, gradually and in the course of generations, is to take shape in this world. But in his ethical code there is a sublimity, distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code; neither is there any parallel to the remarkable art of his parables. The shrewdness and sharpness of his proverbs and his forceful epigrams serve, in an exceptional degree, to make ethical ideas a popular possession. If ever the day should come and this ethical code be stripped of its wrappings of miracles and mysticism, the Book of the Ethics of Jesus will be one of the choicest treasures in the literature of Israel for all time.

[pp.413-414]

Martin Buber (1878-1965)

Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. from German original (1950) by N.P. Goldhawk (London: Routledge, 1951).

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. from German original (1923) by W. Kaufmann (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1970).

Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

Buber’s background: Viennese-born philosopher and theologian. Buber attended the third Zionist Congress in 1899 and remained a life-long Zionist. Influenced by Ahad Ha-Am, he was drawn to the movement for the cultural and spiritual developments he believed a national homeland would encourage among the Jewish people. Buber became interested in Hasidism, which he understood to emphasise the hallowing of the everyday, seeing God in the relationships between individuals, and regarding the essence of religion in terms of engagement with the challenges of the day rather than in specific beliefs and religious activities. *I and Thou* was related to this interest and represented his own philosophy of dialogue (I-Thou dialogue, I-It monologue). He taught at Frankfurt until 1933 when the Nazis forced him out. He continued to teach and encourage Jewish studies in Germany until 1938 when he emigrated to Palestine and taught at Hebrew University.

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus’ close relations to Pharisees are assumed throughout. Jesus saw himself as a prophet who reluctantly came to accept his messianic role. At the trial, Jesus’ view of the messiah changes from prophetic human-fulfiller of God’s will to a more apocalyptic image of a saviour descending from above (TTF 106-109).

Jesus and the Law: Jesus’ approach is similar to the Pharisees in warning against a sterile ‘law’ of external observance rather than internalisation (TTF 58,63). If Jesus is more perfectionist, it is because he believes the end of history is imminent in contrast to the Pharisees, whom we should not despise (TTF 75). Jesus’ faith, as applied to life, echoes Isaiah’s (TTF 24,28,29).

The Question of Originality: Jesus relates to none of the usual categories (TTF 12,13). Jesus is the paradigm of the I-Thou relationship (IT 157). At the same time, Jesus’ experience is fundamentally the same as the Pharisees, in contrast to Paul and some rabbis (TTF 137).

Comments:

- Buber’s style is theological and unconcerned with questions of historicity. He is rather concerned with Jesus’ faith, with *emunah*, Jewish trust in God.
- Despite denying it (12), Buber has a polemical agenda. By comparing the *emunah* found in Jesus, the Hebrew Bible and the Pharisees with Paul’s *pistis*, he reverses the traditional Christian view so that it is Paul who appears legalistic and harsh. He seeks to demonstrate that Judaism emphasises the idea of a dialogical partnership with God and man to bring about redemption, the hallowing of the world.
- Generally, Buber tends to emphasise certain aspects of Judaism (e.g. the vital religiosity of Hasidism) over others (e.g. the halakhot of Rabbinic Judaism). It is his own existentialist interests that are reflected.
- Despite his criticism of Protestant Christianity for its passivity and Catholicism for its view of Judaism as unaware of God’s grace, Buber’s dialogical philosophy and disinterest in Law made him accessible and attractive to Christian thinkers.

I firmly believe that the Jewish community, in the course of its renaissance, will recognize Jesus; and not merely as a great figure in its religious history, but also in the organic context of a messianic development...

whose final goal is the redemption of the world. But I believe equally that we will never recognize Jesus as the Messiah Come, for this would contradict the deepest meaning of our messianic passion.
[MB p.279]

[H]ow powerful, even overpowering, is Jesus' I-saying, and how legitimate to the point of being a matter of course: For it is the I of an unconditional relation in which man calls his You "Father" in such a way that he himself becomes nothing but a son.
[IT p.157]

There are two, and in the end only two, types of faith... Both can be understood from the simple data of our life: the one from the fact that I trust someone, without being able to offer sufficient reasons for my trust in him; the other from the fact that, likewise without being able to give a sufficient reason, I acknowledge a thing to be true... In one the man 'finds himself' in the relationship of faith, in the other he is 'converted' to it. The man who finds himself in it is primarily the member of a community whose covenant... includes and determines him within it; the man who is converted is primarily an individual, one who has become an isolated individual, and the community arises as the joining together of converted individuals... The first of the two types of faith has its classic example in the early period of Israel, the people of faith... the second in the early period of Christianity... It becomes evident that Jesus and central Pharisaism belong essentially to one another, just as early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism do. When I treat the two types of faith frequently as that of the Jews and that of the Christians I do not mean to imply that Jews in general and Christians in general believed thus and still believe, but only that the one faith has found its representative actuality among Jews and the other among Christians. Each of the two had extended its roots into the other camp also, the 'Jewish' into the Christian, but the 'Christian' also into the Jewish and even into pre-Christian Judaism as it arose from 'Hellenistic' religiosity.
[TTF p.7-11]

There is scarcely any need to say that every apologetic tendency is far from my purpose. For nearly fifty years the New Testament has been a main concern in my studies, and I think I am a good reader who listens impartially to what is said. From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother. That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and Saviour had always appeared to me a fact of the highest importance which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavour to understand... My own fraternally open relationship to him has grown ever stronger and clearer, and to-day I see him more strongly and clearly than ever before... I am more than ever certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history of faith and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories.
[TTF pp.12-13]

According to the report in Matthew's Gospel, the fundamental point in the earliest preaching of Jesus in the Galilee was... "The appointed time is fulfilled and God's rule has come near. Turn and believe in his message" (The verb at the end... can be rendered "trust the message!")... Isaiah's word to Ahaz of Judah (Isa. vii:9) [is]: "If you do not trust you will not remain entrusted"... Both the word of Isaiah and the word of Jesus demand in a similar way, not a faith 'in God', which faith the listeners of both possessed as something innate and as a matter of course, but its realization in the totality of life, and especially when the promise arises from amidst catastrophe, and so particularly points towards the drawing near of God's Kingdom. The only difference is that Isaiah looks to it as to a still indefinite future and Jesus to the present.
[TTF pp.24, 28, 29]

For the actuality of the faith of Biblical and Post-Biblical Judaism, and also for the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, fulfilment of Torah means to extend the hearing of the Word to the whole dimension of human experience. This demand made it necessary to struggle against a withering or hardening, which knew of no other fulfilment than the carrying out of rules, and so made the Torah in fact a 'law' which a person had merely to adhere to as such, rather than to comprehend its truth with every effort of the soul and then to realize it... The struggle against it... begins in the accusation of the prophets, ...[and] gains a new impulse in a time of increased danger in the zeal of the Pharisees against... those whose inwardness is a pretence... [Jesus preached in Matt. v:20] "For I say unto you, if your proving true is not greater than that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of God"... The attitude of the Sermon on the Mount to the Torah accordingly appears the opposite of that of the Pharisees; in reality, it is only the sublimation of a Pharisaic doctrine... Of course there can be no question of influence, since the Pharisaic doctrine to which I

refer is not attested until after the time of Jesus... but the great and vital lineage of this doctrine is unmistakable.

[TTF pp.58, 63]

All in all, the saying of Jesus about love for the enemy derives its light from the world of Judaism in which he stands and which he seems to contest; and he outshines it. It is indeed always so when a person in the sign of the *kairos* [eschatological fulfilment of time] demands the impossible in such a way that he compels men to will the possible more strongly than before. But one should not fail to appreciate the bearers of plain light below from amongst whom he arose [i.e. the Pharisees]; those who enjoyed much that was possible so as not to cause men to despair of being able to serve God in their poor everyday affairs.

[TTF p.75]

[For Jesus] the Messiah now is not a royal person [i.e. the Davidic concept of the Messiah] but a prophetic man... The [Messianic] secret is imposed. It is put by Jesus into the heart of the disciples – whose confession indeed confirms him in it – like Isaiah once ‘sealed up’ the message of salvation in the heart of his own. Only when in sight of the end does the attitude of Jesus appear to change... In the account of the trial, which is not to be considered as fundamentally historical, a noteworthy saying of Jesus is quoted (Mark xiv.62) [“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”]. Neither the connexion of the ‘I am’ with that which follows is to be retained [i.e. regarded as authentic], nor that of ‘sitting’ with ‘coming’, nor the ‘power’ which sounds rather like a Gnostic concept; but the reference to the ‘son of man’ or man, who would be ‘seen’ coming with the clouds of heaven, given in the answer to a question about himself, Jesus, has a peculiarly authentic character. ‘Who art thou?’ he has just been asked himself, as he earlier asked the disciples who he was, but he, looking into realms beyond, replied in effect: ‘Thou shalt see the one whom I shall become’. *He* sees him now: I am he... That he imagines himself in his own person as the one who will be removed and afterwards sent again to an office of fulfilment, in the figure of the vision of Daniel, is suggested strongly enough.

[TTF pp.106-109]

God demands from Israel that it should fear Him and love Him – fear belongs to love as the door belongs to the house – like fear that does not flow into love, so love that does not comprehend fear is only one of the ways of serving God as an idol. We see that the God Who speaks here speaks of a partner, in whom He Himself does not arouse or effect, by the power of His own love, this love towards Himself, but rather even if He dreadfully hides himself and His love from him desires to be loved as He is feared. ‘Even if He takes thy soul from thee’: so Pharisaic Judaism (Bab. Berachot 61b) interprets the command to love... It is evident that Jesus, in so far as we are able to unravel his historical reality, occupied a position within this circle of belief. Equally obvious is the fact that Paul had turned from it when he devoted himself to the mystery of Christ.

[TTF p.137]

Samuel Sandmel (1911-1979)

Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Sandmel’s background: Ohio-born Biblical scholar. His parents fled Eastern Europe to escape pogroms. Following a general US education he trained as a Reform rabbi at Hebrew Union College (1932). After serving as a navy chaplain based in California and the Pacific (1942-46), he took his doctorate at Yale in New Testament Studies. Sandmel’s duties as a rabbi for the Hillel Foundation (1939-49) meant he had special responsibilities for Jewish youth and was very conscious of the threat of assimilation. His academic career as professor of Bible and Hellenistic Literature at HUC made him an internationally recognised authority on the relationship between Judaism and the NT. He wrote in the tradition of liberal Judaism, approaching Jesus as a source of inspiration, yet concerned to prevent conversion. His objective writings took into account the non-Jewish scholarship. Other works include *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (1957), *The Genius of Paul; a Study in History* (1958), and *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament* (1978).

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus is difficult to categorise, despite what previous Jewish writers have said (107-8) due to the nature of the sources (19-20). Jesus was neither the first nor the last to claim messianic status (32,33).

Jesus and the Law: Jesus' controversies are with fellow Jews, not with the Judaism he inherited; the attribution of hypocrisy to the nature of Judaism is wrong (137-8). One possible break with tradition related to the food laws (137-8).

The Question of Originality: There is nothing original in Jesus' teachings, although he had his own insights, and it is dangerous to focus on such questions (109). Any originality stems from Jesus' combination of a teacher, a Jewish loyalist and one whose leadership inspired belief in resurrection (109-10). Certainly, Jesus' sense of authority and purpose, and his forgiveness of sins, sets him at variance with Jews and Judaism (137-8). Generally, the Gospels only hint at differences of principle (138).

Comments:

- Sandmel's interest in writing about Jesus is at least partly a concern that Jewish youth should avoid assimilation or conversion (ix, 45).
- Sandmel achieved prominence in the worlds of both New Testament scholarship and the Jewish community.
- Sandmel believes a familiarity with the wider NT scholarship is essential for Jewish NT scholars (92-3).
- Sandmel denies the possibility of reclaiming Jesus (110-11), although he also recognises that some say 'Jesus was a Jew and therefore ours' (103). He sees the problem in terms of religious, psychological, sociological, cultural barriers (4-5).

I have tried to provide a small book that Jewish parents, after they themselves have read it, might put into the hands of college-age students. It has been my observation that a Jewish youngster, away from home and sharing in the great adventure of higher education with fellow students who are Christians, could benefit from such an endeavour.

[p.ix]

Since to all things I react in some measure with the heart, obviously in this matter of Jesus and us Jews I do so too. So do most Jews. A complete psychological syndrome exists, and its existence ought to be acknowledged and its nature described – even though its gravity defies accurate assessment. The 'problem' of Jesus for modern Jews is not only religious and psychological, but it is also cultural and sociological. It is especially rooted in matters of history, in matters of inherited folklore, and in what partakes of folk experience and folk wisdom, even in modern and cosmopolitan situations... Christians and Jews need to recognize that Christianity and Judaism until the modern age... have felt about each other that they were mutually exclusive, reciprocally contradictory of each other, and that the one was true and the other false.

[pp.4-5]

So relatively little material do the Gospels contain that even if there were no problem about contradiction, discordancies, and historical credibility, there would still be insufficient material for a biography, especially in the modern sense.

[pp.19-20]

Jesus was neither the first nor the last in the long history of Judaism by whom or for whom the claim was made that he was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. It would have been normal for such a person deemed the Messiah to attract followers and partisans, and for there to be on the sidelines those who waited to see whether the outcome of events fulfilled the expectations and specifications or not, before deciding whether the particular person was or was not the Messiah... Those Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, despite his death on the cross, made an initial significant alteration in the Messianic pattern, changing it, as it were, from one single event, ushering in the great climax, into two parts, preparation first, and after an interval, the climax [of the second-coming].

[pp.32-33]

We [Jews] do not see Jesus in the way that Christians do, and we cannot pretend that we do. Those of us who belong to the liberal interpretation of Judaism do not acknowledge adherence to the traditional Jewish view of the Messiah; therefore it is all the more impossible to acquiesce in the Christian views related to or derived from the traditional views... It is not alone that the abstract conception of the Christ is alien to us Jews, but that the Christian conception of the significance of the Christ is equally alien. It is a Christian belief that the crucifixion was an atoning death which opened to mankind man's redemption from sin.

[p.45]

[Klausner's] approach to the Gospels exhibits a unique capacity to have reviewed much of the Gospel scholarship and to have remained immune from reflecting it... [T]here is the curious situation relating to Jesus, that Christians are often inordinately eager to cite some Jewish opinion in support of a Christian contention – my own writings have inadvertently served this purpose to some limited extent – with the result that Klausner is often cited by Christians who attribute to him an authority that with all deference he does not deserve. Conservatives especially have taken him to represent not only the Jewish mind but also the epitome of rabbinic learning, apparently unaware of how severely rabbinites have taken him to task... Certainly Kalusner's bad book [*From Jesus to Paul*] would have been inordinately improved by his having drawn on Montefiore's vastly greater scholarship... Yet Klausner's book has unquestionably affected more Jews than any other Jewish writing on Jesus, for his undoubted Jewish loyalties have seemed to pave the way for additional Jews to feel spiritually prepared to enter into phases of New Testament scholarship.
[pp.92-3]

There is quite a long tradition among Jews in the West of reclaiming Jesus for Judaism, and I suspect that in some Jewish circles not only is there no questioning of the propriety of reclamation, but it is even an axiom in the form that Jesus was a Jew, and therefore 'ours'. Before Hitler, one could document a Jewish interest in Jesus which, during and after Hitler, understandably retreated.
[p.103]

It would be easy for someone like me to set forth some ingenious statement about Jesus. I have ample Jewish predecessors to rely on if I were to wish to choose one of the several options. I could with Graetz term Jesus an Essene, with Geiger term him a Pharisee, with Montefiore term him a prophet, and with countless others term him a rabbi (even though rabbi, *as a title*, appears to be later than the age of Jesus). I am withheld from such a statement by the very nature of the problems which have created the variety of opinion among the Christians. It is the problem that the Gospels, the primary sources, are writings from an age at least four decades or more removed from the time of Jesus, and that the Gospels so intertwine authentic material about Jesus with the pious meditation of the Church that I know of no way to separate the strands and to end up with some secure and quantitatively adequate body of material. I simply do not know enough about him to have an opinion, and I surely do not have enough to set him, as it were, in some one single category.
[pp.107-8]

I own to seeing no originality in the teachings of Jesus, for I hold that those passages which deal with his supernatural role reflect not his authentic words but the piety of the developing Church. As to those teachings which are conceivably his, they seem to me to be of a piece with Jewish teaching, and that they range from the commonplaces of that Jewish teaching through a sporadic flash of insight that other Jewish teachers also achieved. Yet I feel that all too often the question of originality is a misguided one, for it can often resolve itself into the unimportant question of mere priority. To my mind the crux of the issue about the Golden Rule is not the question of whether Hillel said it before Jesus, or Jesus before Hillel (Hillel chances to be a little earlier than Jesus), nor whether Hillel's formula in the negative is superior or inferior to Jesus' formula in the affirmative (the "Western Text" of Acts gives the Golden Rule in the negative formula!), nor whether both are, or are not, derived from Leviticus 19. To my mind the issue is that of value, not of priority; I find that there is more in the teachings of Jesus that I admire than that I do not...
[p.109]

I cannot ascribe to the teachings of Jesus a striking uniqueness in particulars which in honesty I do not discern. The uniqueness of Jesus would lie not in single particulars, but in the combination of facets, in the totality of what we may perhaps glimpse of him, and not in any one isolated way. Thus he was in part a teacher, a Jewish loyalist, a leader of men, with a personality unquestionably striking enough to be a leader, and his career must have been exceedingly singular for his followers to say that he had been resurrected.
[pp.109-110]

I discern no possible religious assessment of Jesus, either by me or by other Jews. I cannot share in the sentiments of Montefiore which seem to me to fly in the face of prudent scholarship, nor in Klausner's distant dream of a reclaimed Jesus.
[pp.110-111]

[T]he Gospels are replete with epithets of hypocrisy addressed by Jesus to his contemporaries. Matthew 23:23-26 and Luke 11:39-48 denounce scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy in that they observe the external minutiae but neglect the weightier matters of “law, justice, and mercy, and faith.” In its ordinary meaning, an allegation of hypocrisy challenges not the validity of the commandment being observed, but the good faith of the observer. Jesus in the controversies just noted (if they are historically authentic) is at variance with fellow Jews rather than with his inherited Judaism. In the matter of divorce, for Jesus to have been more rigorous than Moses did not directly contravene him. Only in the vague statement about food laws is Jesus at variance with his inherited Judaism.

I confess that I am not deeply troubled at, or resentful of, these imputations of hypocrisy, in the way that other Jewish commentators have been. Hypocrisy does occur universally in religions, even Christianity, and I do not feel called on to defend the Jews of Jesus’ time for the hypocrisy alleged by Jesus. What amuses me, and occasionally annoys me, is an assessment of Judaism by some individual Christian that implies that Judaism by its mere nature lends itself to hypocrisy in a way in which it is implied that Christianity by its nature does not. The parable of the mote and the beam could well apply here.

But when we turn to the controversies in the Gospels over the role of Jesus, we are in a totally different situation. Here Jesus is at variance with both Jews and Judaism. He attributes to himself the prerogative of forgiving sins (Mark 2:1-12); the Sabbath controversy ends with these words: “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark: 2:28 and parallels); the leaders question him on the source of his authority, but he does not tell them what it is (Mark 11: 27-33 and parallels). Surprisingly, the Gospels are relatively scanty in materials involving the Pharisees and Jesus in a discussion of his role. Rather, the Gospels are written from the standpoint that his opponents never understood him and their hatred of him was blind malice. Hence, the Gospels lack a clear view as to the origin of Jewish hostility to Jesus...

In sum, respecting the criticism by Jesus of Judaism, we are unable to see any clear picture of any profound distance between Jesus and his fellow Jews; we get only hints at such differences which might be called differences of principle. What is completely clear, however, is the repeated hostility, ranging from his allegations of wrong accentuations and hypocrisy through merciless denunciation; “vipers” would seem to be the favorite label.

[pp.137-138].

Schalom Ben-Chorin (1913-1999)

Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus; the Nazarene through Jewish Eyes*, trans. and ed. by Jared Klein and Max Reinhart (London: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

Ben-Chorin’s background: German-born and educated. As Fritz Rosenthal he emigrated to Jerusalem in 1935 where he worked as a journalist. He was a visiting professor at Tübingen and Munich. After the Second World War, he became internationally renowned for his work in restoring relations between Germans and Jews, and Christians and Jews. He was involved in founding the first congregation of Reform Jews in Jerusalem (1958). Other writings include *Paul* (1970) and *Mother Miriam* (1971)

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus did not regard himself as the messiah (7,17-18). He was not an Essene (15) or a prophet (8). Jesus was probably a Pharisee (13-14,16), but no one category is entirely satisfactory. Jesus’ followers came from the common people, but his followers often did not understand their rabbi (47).

Jesus and the Law: Jesus never rejected the authority of scripture, but was interested in the intention of the Law, also a concern of the rabbis. He demonstrated an independent approach (10). He was probably self-educated to an elementary level in Bible, then later continued his studies, attaining a revolutionary level of knowledge (27) and could debate on a par with the Pharisees (47).

The Question of Originality: Jesus’ ethical teaching was unusually radical (59). Jesus’ command to love your neighbour as yourself, even the enemy, is reminiscent of Hillel; the difficulty is rather ‘You have heard it said... hate your enemy’ which should be understood in the context of Qumran texts (60). To have spoken with his own authority does not mean a break with Judaism (8-9). Jesus tends to borrow generally familiar concepts and reinterprets them (e.g. rebirth 20-23).

Comments:

- Ben-Chorin assumes that Jewish intuition is important for understanding Jesus (4-5) and is heavily influenced by Buber (6-7).
- Ben-Chorin's style, despite referring to both Jewish and Christian scholarship, is to suggest links rather than argue them. It is to meander through points of interest in the Gospel narrative.
- Jesus is viewed as a fellow spiritual traveller, searching for the answers to existential questions (e.g. Night of the Watching 148-9).
- Ben-Chorin is somewhat 'preachy', applying the lessons for those involved in Jewish-Christian relations today (e.g. the relevance of the parable of the prodigal son to Jesus two thousand years later 79).
- Ben-Chorin believed that Jesus was married (100-03).

What middle ground can we discern, then, between an unverifiable historical position, on the one hand, and theological-literary fantasy, on the other? *Intuition.*

Intuition and fantasy are not identical. Intuition, as I understand it, grows out of a lifelong familiarity with the text and allows it to be interpreted subjectively. Subjectively, to be sure, but not in an unbridled fashion. Intuitive interpretation proceeds from a deep kindred empathy with Jesus within the Jewish world in which he lived, taught, and suffered.

[pp.4-5]

The Jewish person's relationship to Jesus must be essentially different from that of the Christian – though Jesus comes to Jews with an immediacy, to be sure, only after we have rediscovered the true features of the Jewish man from Nazareth under the painted overlay of Christian iconology. Layer after layer must be removed in order to penetrate to the original countenance of Jesus. But this countenance and this form do not stand in an empty space; they must be examined within the context of the Palestinian Judaism contemporary to him. Any other viewpoint fails to see the true nature of Jesus.

My own path in life has led me closer and closer to Jesus, though only as a result of personally undertaking to recover Jesus' picture from the Christian overpainting. My path to the land of Jesus, the land of Israel, and to the city of his passion, the city of Jerusalem – where I have lived since the mid-1930s – led me out of Catholic Bavaria. There I had encountered the Crucified One in churches and chapels, on little filed crosses and in the Holy Saviour nooks of farmhouses – an image that impressed itself painfully on me as a Jewish child. I have always found so much in this land of Israel, in this city of Jerusalem, and so much in Judaism, even in our own day, that lent to the reports of the Gospel a burning actuality that is always with me. Jesus is certainly a central figure of the Jewish past and the history of the Jewish faith. But he is simultaneously a piece of our present and our future, no different from the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, who have for us more than merely historical relevance.

This view furthermore binds me to the man Christians for whom Jesus is the "One who has come," the Christians for whom Jesus is both the centrepiece of their lives and, ultimately, the Coming One. The New Testament closes with the words of the *Maran 'atha* (The Lord has come): "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). This Coming One interpreted messianically, however, is for me, a Jew, *not* what Jesus is. I also believe, moreover, that Jesus did not think of himself as the Messiah, even if here and there the presentiment of a messianic calling, as unresolved question of his own existence, may have broken through.

[pp.6-7]

Since the nineteenth-century a liberal theology, in Judaism as well as Christianity, has readily designated Jesus as a *prophet*... Jesus was no prophet, no *navi* in the Old Testament sense of the word... The prophetic oration usually begins with formulas such as 'Thus saith the Lord' or 'Hear the Word of the Lord'... Introductory formulas of this sort are foreign to the speeches of Jesus. He speaks upon personal authority.

[pp.8-9]

I do not hesitate to declare that I see in Jesus of Nazareth a *third authority*, whose views are to be placed alongside those of Hillel and Shammai. It is not easy, however, to define Jesus' interpretation of the law. Jesus interprets the law at times mildly, like Hillel, and at other times harshly, like Shammai. And yet I believe that we can recognize in Jesus' interpretation a clear tendency toward the *internalisation of the law*, whereby *love* constitutes the decisive and motivating element.

[p.10]

If in light of the New Testament one faults the Pharisees' insistence upon punctilious adherence to justification by works, we should recall the words of Rabbi 'Akiva, preserved for us in the Babylonian Talmud (Kiddushim 40b): "So Rabbi Tarfon and the elders were gathered in the upper room of the house of Nitheza in Lod, and the question was raised, 'What is more important: doctrine or deed?' Rabbi 'Akiva answered, 'Doctrine.' Then all agreed unanimously that doctrine is superior because doctrine leads to deed." Doctrine here means Torah. Viewed in this way, the religion of the deed, which is a hallmark of the Pharisees, may be properly understood.

The Pharisees were not beyond self-criticism. The Jerusalem Talmud (JT) says the following in Berakhoth 9.5:

There are seven kinds of Pharisees (*perushim*)... the shoulder Pharisee carries his good deeds on his shoulder [i.e., openly, before the whole world]; the gleaning Pharisee says, "Wait for me. I must fulfil the commandments [and have no time for you]"; the balancing Pharisee pays off each debt [i.e., sin] by performing a commandment; the frugal Pharisee says, "From the little I have, what can I set aside for performing commandments?"; the debtor Pharisee says, "Tell me what sin I have committed, and I will perform a commandment to offset it"; the fearing Pharisee is like Job; the loving Pharisee is like Abraham.

The five negative types of Pharisee here are clearly depicted in the New Testament, whereas the two positive types, those in the tradition of Job and Abraham, are visible hardly anywhere in the Gospels.

The most dangerous type of Pharisee, however – and it is on him that the light of the Gospels falls – is the "coloured" Pharisee: that is, the hypocrite. We are warned of this type of Pharisee in the Babylonian Talmud (Sota 22b): "Fear neither the Pharisees nor those who are not Pharisees but only the coloured ones who seem like Pharisees, who do the works of Zimri and demand the reward of Phinehas." This passage alludes to Numbers 25:6-14, which narrates the incident surrounding the Israelite Zimri, who is involved in an unseemly relationship with the Midianite Cozbi and for that is killed by the zealot Phinehas. This criticism of the coloured ones implies that they are *hypocritical moralists*. They are outwardly zealous, but internally they lead unbridled lives.

Among the Pharisees themselves there is much vocal criticism, hardly outdone even by that of the Gospels. For example, Rabbi Yehoshua' says (Mishan, Sota 3.4), "The foolishly pious, the cunningly wicked, the pharisaical woman, and the fleshly mortifications of the Pharisees are ruining the world." A Pharisee himself says this!

In this light, it is probably not wrong to reckon Jesus among the Pharisees, albeit as part of an internal opposition movement within this largest Judaic group of his day. Jesus himself talks like a pharisaic rabbi, although from a greater position of authority; his extraordinarily forceful manner of speaking is, however, most likely a product of the kerygmatic tradition. Nevertheless, the authority with which the Pharisees themselves spoke should not be underestimated. They must be distinguished from their opponents, the Sadducees, who held firmly only to the written Torah, the Pentateuch, as well as to some later parts of the Old Testament. The Pharisees' consciousness of their own authority is exemplified by a legend that tells how the experts in scriptural law decided *against* a heavenly voice, justifying their decision upon Deuteronomy 30:12 "It [the Torah] is not in heaven." Thereupon a heavenly voice declares, "My children have defeated me."

[pp.13-14]

In the nineteenth century the tendency was to count Jesus among the Essenes, but that now appears to be incorrect, given that he did not share their abstinence and in no way rejected the enjoyment of wine.

[p.15]

We may conclude that Jesus cannot be reckoned entirely to have belonged to any single group known to us, although it is to the Pharisees – as peculiar as that may sound – that he had the closest links.

[p.16]

And thus, in the Jewish historical view, Jesus ends up a tragic failure. That does not, however, belittle his greatness, not even in terms of Jewish historical understanding. Rabbi Akiva himself, who considered Bar-Kokheva the Messiah, proved to be tragically wrong and ended up a martyr for his faith. Nevertheless, his tragic mistake did not rob him of any greatness within the Jewish folk consciousness. Quite to the contrary,

the Jewish tradition explains this kind of error with the saying, 'Out of love for Israel, God sometimes blinds the eyes of the wise'. Jesus of Nazareth was also such a tragic erring one whose eyes were blinded out of love for Israel.

[pp.17-18]

'No-one can see the Father without being born from above' (John 3:3)... Jewish folk belief, at the time of Jesus and later, connects rebirth with the transmigration of souls; Jesus himself, at least in the doctrine attributed to him, deepens and reinterprets the concept. (It is typical of Jesus' manner that he borrows generally familiar concepts and reinterprets them, rather than creating new ones)... The conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21 – though it may be a later kerygma – penetrates deeply in to the conceptual sphere of rebirth as understood by Jesus... Jesus' answer is not that a person dies and then is reborn, which would correspond to the concept of the transmigration of souls, but that a person can be reborn from water and spirit... The *tevila*, the immersion, represents the actual rebirth, for the person being immersed is buried by the waters; he goes under in order to rise again symbolically as a new man, purified of his sins. This conception has remained vital in the community of Jesus.

[pp.20-23]

Every deed must be thought through in terms of the law. We should therefore think of Jesus as a self-educated man, who acquired elementary knowledge of the Bible in this little town of Nazareth and then later continued his studies, attaining at last a revolutionary level of knowledge.

[p.27]

We should not, however, imagine that Jesus himself belonged to the '*am-ha'arets*'; quite to the contrary. He shows himself, in his disputes with the learned in the law, to be their full equal. Indeed, numerous passages in the New Testament demonstrate that Jesus' disciples, who did belong the '*am-ha'arets*', did not understand their rabbi.

[p.47]

'But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.' [Matt.5:38-42]... But this way is so radical that it exceeds human capacity to uphold it... The idea that one should not strive against evil is also found in the rabbis. Still, I think that Jesus' radical behaviour in this context is understandable only in light of his imminent eschatological expectations.

[pp.58-60]

The most astonishing statement in this passage is 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy' (Matt 5:43)... Jesus cites this commandment ['You shall love your neighbour as yourself' Lev19:18], together with the love of God, as the highest one (Matt 22:36-40), thereby continuing the tradition of Hillel. What is problematical outside the Sermon on the Mount is not so much where the love of one's enemies is commanded, but where hatred of enemies is expressly commanded... Only a look at the papyrus scrolls at Qumran makes the thought 'you shall hate your enemies' understandable for us, for in the 'War Roll of the Battle of the Sons of Light' of the of the sects of the Dead Sea, there is an explicit command to hate the sons of Belial, the sons of darkness. One must hate them. Jesus thus distinguishes himself from Qumran... It is obvious that among his audience, presumably within the inner circle of his disciples, one or more Qumranians were present.

[p.60]

But the parable [of the Prodigal Son] also received another, much later, interpretation they lay well beyond Jesus' intention. He himself, the narrator of the parable, entirely against his own will became the "lost son of Israel." For almost two thousand years he dwelt in a foreign land, while the older brother, the Jewish people, remained under the strict discipline of the Father. But now a process to fetch Jesus home to the Jewish people has begun. He is returning to his Father's house, and there his older brother will rejoice with him. For our brother Jesus was dead for us but now lives again. He was lost to us and has been found again.

[p.79]

But let us now turn to the key question: was Jesus married? I am quite aware that even posing this question will shock many readers. To Christian thinking the question is objectionable and senseless, for how could the God-Man, the only begotten Son of God, have found a wife equal to him?...

Our intention in raising the question here is far from frivolity. The question arises naturally out of the cultural-historical context. Jesus was addressed by his disciples and the larger community of his followers as “Rabbi.” An unmarried rabbi is hardly imaginable. The Talmud sharply condemns celibacy: “Whoever had no wife is without joy, without blessing... without *Torah*, without walls (against sexual promiscuity),... without peace;... a man without a wife is no man” (BT, Yevamoth 62b).

We must now ask, if Jesus had been unmarried, would his disciples not have questioned him about this fault? Even more, would his opponents not have used against him the fact that in his own life he had left unfulfilled the first of the obligations, or *mitzvot*, in the Torah: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22)?...

Now one may argue that we also read no word about Jesus’ wife or children. That is true. Yet neither do we read anything about the wives of the disciples...

Indeed, we know virtually nothing about the wives of the great teachers of the law and wise men in Israel at the time of Jesus. Nothing is known about Mrs. Hillel or Mrs. Shammai...

I am therefore of the opinion that Jesus of Nazareth, just like every rabbi in Israel, was married. His disciples and his opponents would have questioned him if he had deviated from this universal custom...

By contrast, Jesus frequently chooses the bridegroom as the active figure in his parables, which again suggest that he had experienced a wedding hour. He himself is the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34). The final book of the New Testament, John’s Revelation, speaks about the marriage of the Lamb and concludes, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’” (22:17), to which the eschatological Christ answers, “Surely I am coming soon” (v.20). Even here in the hour of fulfilment he is the bridegroom for whom the bride fervently longs and who will go to her.

None of these images would be appropriate to an unmarried Jesus who knew nothing of a bridal night and matrimonial companionship...

In none of the writings considered sacred within Judaism at the time of Jesus is celibacy idealized. That is significant.

[pp.100-103]

[Regarding the Night of Watching in Gethsemane]

Now the master [Jesus] asks his disciples on this *Leil-Shimmurim* [night of watching] to watch and pray. To watch for *him*, in order that this be the Night of Protection for him as well. But they are weak and drift off to sleep.

He, however, watches, shaken by the creaturely fear of death. One cannot read this report in the Gospels without being moved to tears. This is no hero standing here, no demigod, no myth! This is a man trembling in mortal fear of his very life. And in this hour of fear Jesus is especially close to us. It is inconceivable to me how anyone could interpret this human tragedy in the dogmatic terms of the two-fold nature of Christ.

[148-149]

Geza Vermes (1924-)

Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew; a Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973)

Geza Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1993).

Vermes’ background: Hungarian-born ‘Israelite’, Vermes’ parents converted to Catholicism when he was 7 and he regarded himself as a Catholic Hungarian of Jewish ancestry. At 18 he decided to join the priesthood; he was not interested in theology so much as study. In 1944, with Church approval, he refused to wear a yellow star. In 1947, after being rejected by the Dominicans, he joined the order of Fathers of Notre Dame de Sion in France (founded in 19th C by Jewish converts). When he fell in love with a married woman and married her, he was ‘rejected by the Church on account of our prohibited and sinful marriage.’ In 1958 he could describe his situation as, ‘I used to be a Roman Catholic’. He arrived at Oxford in 1965, where he wished to be known as a ‘(non-observant) Jew’. In 1970 he became a member of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue.

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus’ emphasis upon *teshuvah* reminded many of the prophets and he styled himself upon Elijah and Elisha (JWJ 10). Despite similarities, it would be wrong to see him as a Pharisee (JWJ 35). Jesus is best described as a Galilean Hasid or holyman (JWJ 11), an itinerant preacher and healer (JWJ 31-32). Jesus did not have messianic pretensions (JTJ 126, JWJ 154). Jesus, a Galilean, was nationalist (JWJ 11) and was put to death as a preventative

measure of the Sadducean rulers (RJJ ix-x)

Jesus and the Law: Jesus was probably unversed in halakhic matters and appeared to tolerate deliberate neglect of traditional non-biblical customs (JWJ 11). He could be criticised for overemphasising the ethical teachings at the expense of ritual and the needs of society which are met by organised religion (JWJ 11). Yet he was fundamentally faithful to Torah (JWJ 46). It is doubtful whether Jesus (or anyone in first-century Palestine) would have called for an abolition of distinction between pure and impure foods (JWJ 46-47).

The Question of Originality: Jesus' appeared to irritate Pharisees, despite there being no fundamental disagreement, not least for his presumed spiritual authority (JWJ 11). Jesus was not the only Jew to stress symbolism, inwardness sincerity, but these played a greater part in his thought as a result of his focus upon end times and his bias towards the individual rather than collective (JWJ 46-47). Jesus' *emunah* and *hutzpa* place him in a similar category to the prophets and other Hasids (JWJ 49-50).

Comments:

- Vermes insists upon his objective, historical motivation. He explicitly denies any theological preconceptions (JWJ 1-2) and plays down his background (as either Catholic or Liberal Jew).
- *Jesus the Jew* popularised the idea of Jesus' Jewishness more than any book before, albeit an eccentric, individualist, non-conformist Jew.

In fact, since the figure of the Messiah appears not to have been central to the teaching of Jesus, and since no record has survived of any hostile challenge concerning his messianic status before his last days in Jerusalem; since moreover, he deliberately withheld his approval of Peter's confession and, in general, failed to declare himself to be the Christ, there is every reason to wonder if he really thought himself as such.

[JTJ p.126]

[My quest for the Historical Jesus] has been made without – so far as I am consciously aware – any ulterior motive. My intention had been to reach for the historical truth, for the sake, at the most, of putting the records straight; but definitely not in order to demonstrate some theological preconception...

My purpose, both in the written and the verbal examination of 'Jesus the Jew', has been to look into the past for some trace of the features of the first-century Galilean, before he had been proclaimed either the second Person of the Holy Trinity, or the apostate and bogey man of Jewish popular thought.

[JWJ pp.1-2]

In the somewhat elastic, but extraordinarily perceptive religious terminology of Jesus and the spiritual men of his age, 'to heal', 'to expel demons' and 'to forgive sins' were interchangeable synonyms. Indeed, the language and the behaviour of Jesus is reminiscent of holy men of ages even earlier than his own, and it need cause little surprise to read in Matthew that he was known as 'the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee' (Matt. 21.11), and that his Galilean admirers believed he might be one of the biblical prophets, or Jeremiah, or Elijah *redivivus* (Matt. 16.14). In fact, it could be advanced that, if he modelled himself on anyone at all, it was precisely on Elijah and Elisha.

[JWJ p.10]

Jesus was a Galilean Hasid: there, as I see it, lie his greatness, and also the germ of his tragedy. That he had his share of the notorious Galilean chauvinism would seem clear from the xenophobic statements attributed to him... Jesus was also, and above all, an exemplary representative of the fresh and simple religiousness for which the Palestinian North was noted.

And it was in this respect that he cannot have been greatly loved by the Pharisees: in his lack of expertise, and perhaps even interest, in halakhic matters, common to Galileans in general; in his tolerance of deliberate neglect in regard to certain traditional – though not, it should be emphasized, biblical – customs by his followers; in his table-fellowship with publicans and whores; and last by not least, in the spiritual authority explicitly or implicitly presumed to underpin his charismatic activities, an authority impossible to check, as can be done when teachings are handed down from master to disciple. Not that there appears to have been any fundamental disagreement between Jesus and the Pharisees on any basic issue, but whereas Jesus, the preacher of *teshuvah*, of repentance, felt free rhetorically to overemphasize the ethical as compared with the ritual – like certain of the prophets before him – he perhaps could be criticized for not paying enough attention to those needs of society which are met by organized religion.

[JWJ p.11]

Jesus was a charismatic holy man, a Hasid, not only as an exorcist but also as a teacher. He did not sit in a schoolhouse reading and interpreting Holy Writ, or analysing and reconstructing the tradition of the elders. His existence was rather that of an itinerant preacher and healer.

[JWJ pp.31-32]

Reminiscent of many a rabbinic dictum, his words as reported by Luke, himself a Greek addressing Gentiles, leave no room for doubt: 'It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the Law to fall' (Luke 16.17; Matt. 5.18).

The controversial sayings attributed to Jesus in the gospels have to be considered against this faithfulness to the Torah. Some of the arguments turn on the interpretation of customs such as hand-washing before meals (Mark 7.15 par.); others are associated with the Sabbath and its observance. Jewish legal teaching – *halakhah* – was still in a fluid state in his time; the great endeavour of unification and definition resulting in so-called 'orthodoxy' was not made until after AD 70. He is admittedly often represented by New Testament exegetes, mostly on the basis of a gloss appended by Mark to a paradoxical question posed by Jesus, as having rejected the dietary laws. 'Do you not see that nothing that goes from outside into man can defile him?' Mark gives Jesus to enquire, adding as his own observation, 'Thus he declared all foods clean' (Mark 7.18-19). But on reflection are we not bound to conclude *a priori* that in a Palestinian environment the abolition of all distinction between pure and impure food is almost inconceivable? Besides, what about the historically dependable claim in the Acts of the Apostles, that Jesus' immediate followers found the very idea of touching forbidden food horrible and scandalous? (Acts 10.13-16)...

Again, the gospels themselves often involve Jesus in polemics over observance of the Sabbath. Here, the main point to remember is that in Judaism the saving of life overrides the Sabbath laws. During the bloody Hadrianic persecution, a hundred years after the time of Jesus, the rabbis recognized it as taking precedence of *all* laws with the exception of idolatry, incest and murder. The text from Leviticus 18.5, 'You shall keep my statutes... by which a man shall live', was interpreted to mean that observance of the Torah should not lead to death. In the case of Jesus' Sabbath debates, where the subject at issue is almost always the healing of the sick, the principle emerging from them appears to be that every cure, great or small, is life-saving...

Where the Law is concerned, the chief distinction of Jesus' piety lies in this extraordinary emphasis on the real inner religious significance of the commandments. Needless to say, he was not the only Jewish teacher to insist on symbolism, inwardness and sincerity. Philo and Josephus did the same. So did many of the rabbis, and the Qumran sectaries. But I believe it is true to say that interiority, purity of intention, played a greater part in Jesus' thought, possible because of his stress on eschatological finality... but also because of his natural bias towards the individual and personal rather than the collective.

[JWJ pp.46-47]

The total simplicity and confidence required of the child of God as Jesus represents him is the biblical *emunah* (faith/trust, the virtue which, according to Martin Buber, Jesus and the prophets possessed in common. It may also point to an inheritance from ancient Hasidism, where the same spirit prevailed. The first-century BC charismatic, Honi (or Onias the Righteous, as Flavius Josephus names him), is famous for his petulant threat that he would not step outside the circle which he had drawn around himself until God showed mercy to his children and ended the long season of drought. Honi's behaviour is said to have provoked Simeon ben Shetah, the leading Pharisee of that time, to comment resentfully: 'If you were not Honi, I would excommunicate you. But what can I do with you, for in site of your importunity, God does what you want?' (*mTaan.* 3.8). The rabbis were sticklers for correct behaviour and disapproved of temerity such as Honi's; but they were compelled to confess that it sometimes worked. '*Huzpa*', impertinence, 'has its usefulness even towards heaven,' reads the Talmud (*bSanh.* 105a). It is *emunah* that Jesus teaches when he recommends that the child of God should lay aside material and temporal anxieties and commit itself wholly to the care of the Father in heaven.

[JWJ pp.49-50]

The arrest and execution of Jesus were due, not directly to his words and deeds, but to their possible insurrectionary consequences feared by the nervous authorities in charge of law and order in that powder-keg of first-century Jerusalem, overcrowded with pilgrims. Had Jesus not caused an affray in the Temple by overturning the tables of the merchants and money-changers, or had even chosen to do so at a time other than

Passover – the moment when the hoped-for Messiah, the final liberator of the Jews, was expected to reveal himself – he would most probably have escaped with his life. He died on the cross for having done the wrong thing (caused a commotion) in the wrong place (the Temple) at the wrong time (just before Passover). Here lies the real tragedy of Jesus the Jew.

[RJJ ix-x]

David Flusser (1917-2000)

David Flusser, 'Jesus, his Ancestry and the Commandments of Love' in James H. Charlesworth, ed, *Jesus' Jewishness; Exploring the Place of Jesus in Early Judaism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991).

David Flusser, *Jesus*, trans. from German original (1968) by Ronald Walls (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

Second edition with Brad Young (1997).

Flusser's background: Austrian-born of emancipated Jewish parents, Flusser was educated at Christian schools. His interest in Judaism was, in part, a reaction against his parents. He escaped the holocaust, emigrating to Palestine in the late 1930s where he became an observant Jew and mastered the Talmudic literature. He himself studied in Prague where he met one Christian pastor who profoundly influenced his view of Jesus and Christianity (J 17). He went on to Hebrew University where he spent the next 50 years as professor of Early Christianity and Comparative Religion. He reputedly knew 26 languages, 9 of which he lectured in around the world on his specialist subjects of Dead Sea Scrolls, Judaism in the NT period and early Christianity.

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus was a religious genius, impossible to compartmentalise (J 7-8). While not a Pharisee (J 55-56), his preaching of love set him closest to Pharisees of the school of Hillel (J 74). With regard to his teachings regarding morality, he was influenced by the Essenes (J 76,78-79). Jesus came to see himself as the messiah (J 29,122).

Jesus and the Law: Jesus' interests veered towards aggadah rather than halakhah, emphasising ethical rather than legal matters, but despite this he was fundamentally orthopraxic (J 46-47). He appears to have been at home in the Scriptures and Oral traditions, and was better educated than Paul (JACL 161). One possible area where he breaks with halakhah relates to the plucking of grain on the Sabbath (J 46-47). It is important to note that much of the law was in flux at this time (J 46-47).

The Question of Originality: Jesus was a religious genius and this explains the difficulties scholars have had in unearthing the historical Jesus: it is not so much a matter of evidence as it is a difficulty in categorizing Jesus (J 7-8). With his teaching of unconditional love, Jesus indicated the way forward for Jewish teaching (JACL 173). Jesus' revolutions (J 81) included the love of one's enemies (J 83,88), his call for a new morality (J 82-83), his idea of the imminence of the Kingdom of Heaven (J 90-92).

Comments:

- Flusser was one of the first Jewish historians to ignore their own Jewishness when approaching Jesus; he himself stressed his objectivity and the absence of 'any axe to grind'. There is no sense of defensiveness or hostility regarding Jesus or Christianity in his writings. He is very positive about Jesus and Christianity. He does not explicitly deny the virgin birth. He sees Jesus' life and teaching as meaningful and relevant for the modern world (JACL 173-174).
- Flusser represents the dove-tailing of Jewish scholarship and NT studies, and it indistinguishable from mainstream NT scholarship, which he fully integrated.
- The Jerusalem School with which Flusser is associated (with Robert Lindsay) assumes that it is possible to reconstruct a life of Jesus with knowledge of the Jewish background, and that the gospel material was more reliable than was often supposed (JACL 173-174), not least because a Hebrew document lies behind the synoptics.
- In contrast to other Jewish writers Flusser stressed the 'deep connections' between Judaism and Christianity, rather than the differences. He believed a Hebrew original lies behind the Gospel accounts of Jesus' sayings.

I grew up in the strongly Catholic, Bohemian town of Pribram. The town was one of the great centers of pilgrimage in Central Europe. Because of the humane atmosphere in Czechoslovakia at that time, I did not experience any sort of Christian aversion to my Jewish background. In particular, I never heard any accusation of deicide directed against my people. As a student at the University of Prague, I became

acquainted with Josef Perl, a pastor and member of the Unity of Bohemian Brethren, and I spent many evenings conversing with him at the local YMCA in Prague. The strong emphasis which this pastor and his fellow brethren place on the teaching of Jesus and on the early, believing community in Jerusalem stirred in me a healthy, positive interest in Jesus, and influenced the very understanding of my own Jewish faith as well. Interacting with these Bohemian Brethren played a decisive role in the cultivation of my scholarly interests; their influence was one of the foremost reasons that I decided to occupy myself with the person and message of Jesus.

Later in life I became interested in the history of the Bohemian Brethren, and I discovered links between this group and other similar movements in the past and present. I have since had the honor to become acquainted with members of one such movement having spiritual links to the Bohemian Brethren—the Mennonites in Canada and the United States. When my German book on Jesus was first published, a leading Mennonite asked me if the book were Christian or Jewish. I replied, “If the Christians would be Mennonites, then my work would be a Christian book.” What I have set out to do here is to illuminate and interpret, at least in part, Jesus’ person and opinions within the framework of his time and people. My ambition is simply to serve as a mouthpiece for Jesus’ message today.

[*Jesus*, second edition, p. 17]

The main purpose of this book is to show that it is possible to write the story of Jesus’ life. True, we have fuller records about the lives of contemporary emperors, and some of the Roman poets; but, with the exception of the historical Flavius Josephus, and possibly St. Paul, among the Jews of post Old Testament times Jesus is the one about whom we know most...

When a religious genius appears within an environment that allows a precise documentation of his development, and of the circumstances of his life, there is always a temptation to try to uncover the psychological background leading up to this religious phenomenon. The reason why such psychological studies are often unsatisfactory is because the Spirit blows where he wills. This is especially true of personalities, themselves possessed by the Spirit... Our inability to provide a psychology of Jesus that would not sound a jarring note arises not from the type of SOURCES at our disposal so much as from the nature of the personality of Jesus.

[*Jesus* pp.7-8]

[Regarding Jesus’ baptism in Matt 3 and Mark 1] If we accept the traditional form of the heavenly message Jesus is described as ‘My Son’; but if the heavenly voice intoned the words of Isaiah, [‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations’ Isa. 42:1] Jesus must have understood that he was being set apart as the Servant of God, the Chosen One. For him, the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was part of John’s baptism, held another significance that was to become decisive for his future life. Neither Son nor Servant, nor Chosen One were exclusively Messianic titles – the last two could also denote the dignity of the prophetic office – but by these titles, Jesus learned that he was now chosen, called, set apart. Nothing that we have learned casts any doubt upon the historicity of Jesus’ experience at his baptism in the Jordan.

[*Jesus* p.29]

Few people seem to realize that in the synoptic gospels, Jesus is never shown in conflict with current practice of the law – with the single exception of the plucking of ears of corn on the Sabbath. On this incident, Luke (6:1-5) is the closest to the original account: “On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some ears of grain, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?’” The general opinion was that on the Sabbath it was permissible to pick up fallen ears of grain, and rub them between the fingers; but according to Rabbi Jehuda, also a Galilean, it was also permissible to rub them in one’s hand. Some of the Pharisees, therefore, found fault with Jesus’ disciples for behaving in accordance with their Galilean tradition. The Greek translator of the original was unacquainted with the customs of the people, and to make the scene more vivid, added the statement about plucking the corn as well, thus introducing the one and only act of transgression of the law recorded in the synoptic tradition.

In the case of washing hands before a meal, the synoptic tradition is not to blame for the misunderstanding. The precept about washing hands was neither part of written nor of oral teaching. In Jesus’ time the precept ran: “Washing hands before a meal is a matter of choice, ablution after a meal is obligatory.” This custom concerned rabbinic regulations which are first found, perhaps, in the generation before Jesus. Even the most bigoted village Pharisee of those days would have shaken his head uncomprehendingly had anyone asserted

that, because Jesus' disciples did not always wash their hands before eating, Jesus had broken the law of Moses. Viewed from the standpoint of the gradation of Jewish precepts, the scribes in conversation with Jesus, described the washing of hands as no more than "a tradition of the fathers" (Mk. 7:5). Jesus, too, was using the concepts of his own time when he described the rabbinical prescription of washing of hands – not obligatory in those days – as "a tradition of men" (Mk. 7:8) in contrast to the commandments of written and oral teaching.

The prescription of the washing of hands before a meal was not generally binding in those days for the simple reason that it was one of those rules of purification that did not affect all Jews, but only those particular groups of Jews who had accepted them voluntarily for life. The degree and extent of this obligation varied. Under strict obligation were the Pharisees, a society whose rules of ritual purity were still much looser than those of the Essene community. Thus, it was natural that in the debate on washing of hands, Jesus should have had in mind this very category of purification: "not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man" (Mt. 15:11). What Jesus said has, therefore, nothing to do with a supposed abrogation of the Judaic law, but is part of a criticism of the Pharisees. The general truth that strict observation of ritual purity can itself encourage moral laxity, was applicable even in Jesus' day.

[*Jesus* pp.46-47]

The Essene writings are full of the bitterest attacks upon the party of the Pharisees... The Pharisees were described as 'slippery exponents', their actions were hypocrisy... This reminds us of Jesus' words... Nevertheless, the gap between the Essene attack upon the Pharisees and Jesus' criticism of them is very big. The Essenes sharply rejected the doctrine of the Pharisees, whereas Jesus said, 'The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice' (Mt.23:1-2)

In the Pharisees Jesus saw the contemporary heirs of Moses and said that men should model their lives upon their teaching. This makes sense, for although Jesus was apparently indirectly influenced by Essenism, he was basically rooted in universal non-sectarian Judaism, and the philosophy and practice of this Judaism was that of the Pharisees. Yet it would be wrong to describe Jesus simply as a Pharisee in the broad sense... He did view the Pharisees with detachment, as it were, and refused to identify with them.

[*Jesus* p.55-56]

Although not really a Pharisee himself, he was closest to the Pharisees of the school of Hillel who preached love, but he pointed the way to further unconditional love – even of one's enemies and of sinners.

[*Jesus* pp.74]

Like the Essenes of his own time, Jesus too regarded all possessions as a threat to true piety... For both the Essenes and Jesus, therefore, poverty, humility, purity of heart and ingenious simplicity were the essential religious virtues... Radical sects can often be quite amiable, and the Essenes who, although less unfriendly in his times, still had not discarded their misanthropic theology of hatred... In the course of time, an inhuman ideology can produce almost human consequences. This happened with the Essenes. This humanization was fully worked out in Jewish circles that existed on the fringes of Essenism and were simultaneously influenced by the sensitivity of classical Judaism. Jesus was familiar with the ideas current in these circles and incorporated them into his transvaluation of all values.

[*Jesus* pp.76,78,79]

The paradox of Jesus' break with customary biblical morality was marvellously expressed in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16). A proprietor went out to hire workers for his vineyard, and promised each one a daily wage of one denarius. In the evening he paid them all the same wage irrespective of the length of time they had worked. Those who had started work early began to complain, and so the proprietor said to one of them: "'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'" So the last will be first, and the first last."

Here as elsewhere the principle of reward is accepted by Jesus, but all the norms of the usual concepts of the righteousness of God are abrogated. One might think that this comes about because, in his all-embracing love and mercy, God makes no distinctions between men; but with Jesus, the transvaluation of all values is not idyllic: even misfortune does not distinguish between the sinner and the just man. On one occasion

someone brought the news to Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifices. The bystanders obviously expected a political reply, but Jesus said: “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Lk. 13:1-5).

We might say, therefore, that Jesus’ concept of the righteousness of God is incommensurable to reason: man cannot measure it, but can grasp and understand it. It leads to the preaching of the kingdom in which the last will be first, and the first last. It leads also from the Sermon on the Mount to Golgotha where the just man dies a criminal’s death. It is at once profoundly moral, and yet beyond good and evil. In this paradoxical scheme, all the “important,” customary virtues, and the well-knit personality, worldly dignity, and the proud insistence upon the formal fulfilment of the law, are fragmentary and empty. Socrates questioned the intellectual side of man. Jesus questioned the moral. Both were executed. Is this accidental?

[*Jesus* pp.82-83]

The germ of revolution in Jesus’ preaching does not emerge from a criticism of Jewish law, but from other premises altogether. These premises did not originate with Jesus. To the contrary, his critical assault stemmed from attitudes already established before his time. Revolution broke through at three points: the radical interpretation of the commandment of mutual love, the call for a new morality, and the idea of the kingdom of heaven....

Luke 6:36 is a parallel to Matthew 5:48: “You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The best way of translating this saying is, “There must be no limit in your goodness, as your heavenly Father’s goodness knows no bounds” [New English Bible]. Matthew 5:48 is merely the conclusion to a short homily where Jesus teaches that God reaches out in love to all people, regardless of their attitude and behaviour toward him, “for He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” In this Jesus is not far from the humane attitude of other Jews. R. Abbahu said, “Greater is the day of rainfall than the day of resurrection. For the latter benefits only the pious, whereas the former benefits pious and sinners alike” [B. Ta’anit 7a]. R. Abbahu lived about 300 A.D., but there is a similar saying dating from Jesus’ time. Thus, it is no wonder that in such a spiritual atmosphere Jesus drew his daring conclusion: “Love your enemies!” (Matt. 5:44). In other words, “Return love to those who hate you” or: “Do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27)....

A man’s relationship to his neighbour ought, therefore, to be determined by the fact that he is one with him both in his good and in his evil characteristics. This is not far from Jesus’ commandment to love, but Jesus went further and broke the last fetters still restricting the ancient Jewish commandment to love one’s neighbour. We have already seen that Rabbi Hanina believed that one ought to love the righteous and not hate the sinner. Jesus said, “I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). It is true that in those days semi-Essene circles had reached similar conclusions from different presuppositions, and Jesus’ moral teaching was influenced by these circles. Yet, influences do not explain everything.

[*Jesus*, second edition, pp. 81, 83, 88]

For Jesus as for the rabbis, the kingdom of God is both present and future, but the perspectives are different. When Jesus was asked when the kingdom was to come he said: “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is the midst of you” (Lk. 17:21-22). He said: “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God had come upon you” (Lk. 11:20). There are individuals, therefore, who are already in the kingdom of heaven, not, as with the rabbis, because it was always so, but because at a specific point in time the kingdom had broken out upon earth...

That, then, is the “realised eschatology” of Jesus. He is the only Jew of ancient times known to us, who preached not only that men were on the threshold of the end of time, but that the new age of salvation had already begun...

In the message of the kingdom is fulfilled that which Jesus recognized and desired. There the unconditional love of God for all becomes visible, and the boundaries between sinner and just person are shattered. Human dignity becomes null and void, the last become first, and the first become last. The poor, the hungry, the meek, the mourners, and the persecuted inherit the kingdom of heaven. In Jesus’ message of the kingdom, the social factor does not, however, seem to be the decisive thing. His revolution has to do chiefly with the transvaluation of all the usual moral values, and hence his promise is specially for sinners: “Truly, I say to

you the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Mt. 21:31-32). Jesus appealed to the social outcasts and the despised...

Even the non-eschatological ethical teaching of Jesus can presumably be oriented towards his message of the kingdom. Because Satan and his powers will be overthrown and the present world-order shattered, the are to be regarded as almost indifferent, and ought not to be strengthened by opposition. Therefore, one ought not to resist evil; therefore, one ought to love one’s enemy and not provoke the Roman empire to attack. For when the kingdom of God appears, all this will vanish.

[*Jesus* pp.90-92]

I am convinced that there are reliable reports that the Crucified One “appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.” Last of all, he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus (1 Cor. 15:3-8). When Jesus answered the high priest’s question about his Messiahship with the words, “From now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God,” did the man already believe that he, too, would escape the fate that threatened, or, as is more likely, that he would rise from the dead? At all events, the high priest correctly understood that by these worlds he was confessing that he was the Messiah. Therefore Caiaphas said, “What need have we of further witnesses? You have heard it from his own mouth” (Luke 22:71).

[*Jesus* p.122]

The anecdote Luke tells of the boy Jesus does not contradict the rest of what we know about Jesus’ Jewish education. It will be affirmed with some justification that Jesus’ disciples were “uneducated, common men” (Acts 4:13). This led to the assertion – made, indeed, by the historically less reliable John (7:15) – that Jesus himself was uneducated, that he had “never studied.” Viewing Jesus’ sayings against the background of contemporary Jewish learning, however, it is easy to observe that Jesus was far from uneducated. He was perfectly at home both in Holy Scripture and in oral tradition and knew how to apply this scholarly heritage. Jesus’ Jewish education was incomparably superior to that of Paul.

External corroboration of Jesus’ Jewish scholarship is provided by the fact that, although he was not an approved scribe, people were accustomed to address him as “Rabbi” (my teacher). “The form of address ‘Rabbi’ was in common use in those days, and was specially in favour to describe scholars and teachers of the Torah. It had not yet become restricted to expert and ordained teachers.” The generation following Jesus was the first to know the title as an academic degree. Jesus did not approve of the pleasure so many Pharisees took in being addressed as rabbi.

[‘*Jesus, His Ancestry, and the Commandment of Love*’ pp.161-162]

The present age seems especially well disposed to understand Jesus and his interest. A new sensitivity has been awakened in us by profound anxiety over the future, and over the present. Today we are receptive to Jesus’ reappraisal of all our usual values, and many of us have become aware of the questioning of the moral norm, which is his starting point too. Like Jesus, we feel drawn to social pariahs, to the sinners. When he says that we must not resist evil because, even by our denial, we only encourage the intrinsically indifferent play of forces within society and the world at large, we Jews and Christians of today at least can understand. If we free ourselves from the chains of dead prejudice, we are able to appreciate his demand for undivided love, not as philanthropic weakness, but as a true psychological consequence.

The enormity of his life, too, speaks to us today: the call of his baptism; the severing of ties with his estranged family and his discovery of a new, sublime sonship; the pandemonium of the sick and possessed; and his death on the cross. Therefore, the words which Matthew (28:30) puts into the mouth of his risen Lord take on for us a new, non-ecclesiastical meaning: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

[‘*Jesus, His Ancestry, and the Commandment of Love*’ pp.173-174]

Pinchas Lapide (1922-)

Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus; a Jewish Perspective* (London: S.P.C.K., 1983) from the German original 1977.
Pinchas Lapide and Ulrich Luz, *Jesus in Two Perspectives; a Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1985) from the German original 1979.

Lapide's background: Canadian-born Orthodox Jew who moved to Israel in 1938 where he lectured at the American College in Jerusalem on the New Testament. During the Second World War he was an officer in the Jewish Brigade of the British army. He went on to serve Israel as a diplomat and a journalist (as head of the Jerusalem press bureau). He lived in Germany and lectured throughout Europe, a frequent participant in Jewish-Christian dialogue, concerned with reconciliation between Jews and Christians and Jews and Germans.

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus was essentially a Pharisaic teacher, influenced by the prophets (JTP 114-115). Jesus did not declare himself to his people as Messiah; he was construed as such by his later disciples (JTP 45-48). Jesus had a preparatory role in messianic history, making it possible for non-Jews to hear about the monotheistic God (JTP 115-116).

Jesus and the Law: An external indication of Jesus' orthopraxic teaching is that the people did not reject him (JTP 59), although he certainly offended some (JTP 67). He was essentially faithful to the Torah (JTP 91-92).

The Question of Originality: The impact of Jesus' teaching and the power of preaching explains his popularity (JTP 67). The possible role of Christ as mediator between Gentile and God means Jesus was more than a simply a first-century Jew (JTP 115-116).

Comments:

- Lapide regards the resurrection as historical (RJ 69-70). The evidence rings true e.g. in all the gospels, the witnesses included women and were highly excited, elements which appear to decrease believability (RJ 95-96,111). He criticises Christians who abstract the event (RJ 123-131).
- Lapide regards the key difference between Judaism and Christianity as the issue of the messiah. "My Judaism is 'catholic' enough, in the original meaning of the word, to find a place for Spinoza as well as for Jesus, for Philo as well as for Josephus. I do not see why I should reject a person out of Judaism such as the Rabbi of Nazareth just because some of the Christian pictures of Christ do not suit me."
- Changed circumstances allow Jews to give their honest opinions about Jesus, and even, in the case of Lapide, to consider Christology and resurrection (JTP 17-18).

But how can it be explained that, against all plausibility, his adherents did *not* finally scatter [in comparison to other messianic claimants], were *not* forgotten, and that the cause of Jesus did not reach its infamous end on the cross?.. The answer of the apostles was brief and unambiguous: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[*The Resurrection of Jesus* p.69-70]

According to all four Gospels, women are the first ones to find the tomb of Jesus open and empty. In a purely fictional narrative one would have avoided making women the crown witnesses of the resurrection since they were considered in rabbinic Judaism as incapable of giving valid testimony... It has been taught that women are unable to give testimony in court (Yalkut Shimoni I,82). Since, however, in exceptional case (Rosh Ha-Shanah 22a) a woman was permitted to give testimony before court that a man had died so that his widow was permitted to marry again, it had to strike the disciples as irony that here women wanted to testify to the opposite, namely, the resurrection of a dead person.

[*The Resurrection of Jesus* p.95-96]

For only a sworn enemy of Jesus can describe the end of his life in such a brutal, concrete way – or men who are deeply convinced that this miserable dying of the Nazarene neither was nor is the last world of God – that his exit from this world became the entrance into blessedness.

[*The Resurrection of Jesus* p.111]

[Three possible explanations for the Resurrection]:

(1) The resurrection was a historical event that took place in the framework of this world and in the time of the first century in Jerusalem. That would be the first possibility. It has to be decided whether such an event, after such a long time and after the accretion of many layers of legends, is at all recognizable – or whether it remains covered up to the point of irretrievability.

(2) The second possibility is that the resurrection is a religious myth – as in all the mystery cults of the ancient Orient; a mythically colored legend, lacking any reality. In the half-mocking words of Friedrich

Schiller, in his “Song to the Friends,” which some of these friends may have related to the resurrection: “Everything repeats itself in life, eternally young is only the fancy, that which has never and nowhere happened, that alone does not grow old.” In these lines, it is true, Jesus is accorded the mythical immortality of a Prometheus, or a Faust, or King Lear. However, he is at the same time removed from all historical reality. The Jewish man of God from Galilee is disembodied into a Greek figure of legends – in crass contradiction to the faith in divine revelations within the innerworldly life which characterizes the whole Bible.

(3) The third possibility would be that the reports of the resurrection rest on visions of individual persons who experienced them as real experiences but so that they are completely inaccessible to the objective test of the sciences. Most Jewish scholars consider this third possibility as the most likely one: It could have been a case of honest autosuggestion – as we find it now and then in the Talmud. Disciples see their departed master in a dream. A woman speaks with her deceased husband in a vision. A whole table fellowship believes strongly in the prophet Elijah, sees him present, and speaks with him. Where the power of faith is involved, Jews have a power of imagination that sometimes borders on the supernatural – without any need to doubt the subjective honesty of that which is experienced.

In regard to the future resurrection of the dead, I am and remain a Pharisee. Concerning the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, I was for decades a Sadducee. I am no longer a Sadducee since the following deliberation has caused me to think this through anew. In none of the cases where rabbinic literature speaks of such visions did it result in an essential change in the life of the resuscitated or of those who had experienced the visions. Only the vision remains which was retold in believing wonderment and sometimes also embellished, but it did not have any noticeable consequences.

It is different with the disciples of Jesus on that Easter Sunday. Despite all the legendary embellishments, in the oldest records there remains a recognizable historical kernel which cannot simply be demythologized. When this scared, frightened band of the apostles which was just about to throw away everything in order to flee in despair to Galilee; when these peasants, shepherds, and fishermen, who betrayed and denied their master and then failed him miserably, suddenly could be changed overnight into a confident mission society, convinced of salvation and able to work with much more success after Easter than before Easter, then no vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such a revolutionary transformation. For a sect or school or an order, perhaps a single vision would have been sufficient – but not for a world religion which was able to conquer the Occident thanks to the Easter faith. Professor Klausner said in Jerusalem in answer to the question whether Jesus had lived at all:

If the four evangelists should have freely invented such believable and broadly agreeing reports about the Nazarene, then that would be a greater miracle than all the miraculous deeds of Jesus tied together.

Something similar is probably also true of the resurrection. If the defeated and depressed group of disciples overnight could change into a victorious movement of faith, based only on autosuggestion or self-deception – without a fundamental faith experience – then this would be a much greater miracle than the resurrection itself.

In a purely logical analysis, the resurrection of Jesus is “the lesser of two evils” for all those who seek a rational explanation of the worldwide consequences of that Easter faith. The true miracle is the fact that this Jewish group of Jesus’ followers came to faith, a miracle which, like all miracles, escapes any exact description or scientific proof.

Any kind of deception is excluded in any case, be it the theft of the body, trance, or the invention of a miracle, for then – Joseph Klausner stresses this – “their subsequent belief (would be) utter trickery and fraud. That is impossible. *Deliberate imposture* is not the substance out of which the religion of millions of people is created” (*Jesus of Nazareth*, p.357). It also says of John the Baptist, “a righteous and holy man,” that he, after his martyr’s death by Herod “has been raised from the dead” – and then his opponents asserted that his disciples had come, picked up his body, and buried it in a tomb (Mark 6:14-29).

This recalls not only the rumor that Jesus’ “disciples came by night and stole him away” (Matt. 28:11ff.), but also the ascension of Elijah which even among the disciples of the prophet encountered wide disbelief: “They sent therefore fifty men; and for three days they sought him but did not find him. And they came back to (Elisha) ...and he said to them, ‘Did I not say to you, Do not go?’” (2 Kings 2: 17f.).

Faith and doubt run like twin threads crosswise through the whole history of Israel. The manner in which the resurrection took place is today just as uncertain as it was in Hillel’s time, when the controversy concerning the general resurrection of the dead occupied rabbis (Genesis Rabbah 14 and Leviticus Rabbah 14) but wisely was left open...

Be that as it may, something must have happened which we can designate as a historical event since its

results were historical – although we are completely unable to comprehend the exact nature of the occurrence.

I remember an old folk song which I heard recently in Berlin:

At Easter in Jerusalem,

Something happened.

That is still wonderful today,

Not everyone can comprehend it.

I can believe in such a real Something which in a purely rational way can neither be proved nor refuted – a Something that does not rest on the wish of the father of the thought, nor is it a mirage. I cannot believe in the empty tomb nor in the angels in white garments nor in the opening of the heaven nor in the absurd miraculousness of the so-called Gospel of Peter. All that belongs to the pious fraud of later generations which themselves no longer felt the direct impact – but tried to whip up enthusiasm by means of embellishing the truth. If one removes cautiously all these literary additions, a certain “something” remains for us which in the apostles’ simple manner of expression has been called resurrection.

Modern theologians frequently use strange paraphrases for the resurrection of Jesus:

- “Jesus has risen into the kerygma,” says Rudolf Bultmann.
- “He has risen because he has conquered the innermost center of all earthly being eternally in his death,” says Karl Rahner.
- “The faith in the resurrection is an Old Christian form of expression... which we today cannot accept as obligatory for ourselves,” writes Herbert Braun.
- “Easter means: The cause of Jesus goes on,” declares Willi Marxsen for whom the resurrection is an “interpretament” of the early church, i.e., a way of interpreting an unexpected event.
- “The event which we designate according to late Jewish tradition with the metaphor ‘resurrection from the dead’ does not mean a change but a confirmation of Jesus.” Thus Heinz Zahrnt.
- “To believe in the resurrection of Jesus means to undertake the surprising risk to reckon with Jesus Christ as a present reality,” says Meinrad Limbeck.

All this may be true and correct. I don’t know. But most of these and similar conceptions strike me as all too abstract and scholarly to explain the fact that the solid hillbillies from Galilee who, for the very real reason of the crucifixion of their master, were saddened to death, were changed within a short period of time into a jubilant community of believers. Such a post-Easter change, which was no less real than sudden and unexpected, certainly needed a concrete foundation which can by no means exclude the possibility of any physical resurrection.

One thing we may assume with certainty: neither the Twelve nor the early church believed in the ingenious wisdom of theologians! Indeed, they hardly would have understood what the gentlemen of scholarship want to say in such a roundabout manner.

I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material facticity of the resurrection. Their varying attempts at dehistoricizing the Easter experience which give the lie to all four evangelists are simply not understandable to me in any other way. Indeed, the four authors of the Gospels definitely compete with one another in illustrating the tangible, substantial dimension of this resurrection explicitly. Often it seems as if renowned New Testament scholars in our days want to insert a kind of ideological or dogmatic curtain between the pre-Easter and the risen Jesus in order to protect the latter against any kind of contamination by earthly three-dimensionality. However, for the first Christians who thought, believed, and hoped in a Jewish manner, the immediate historicity was not only a part of that happening but the indispensable precondition for the recognition of its significance for salvation. For all these Christians who believe in the incarnation (something which I am unable to do) but have difficulty with the historically understood resurrection, the word of Jesus of the “blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel” (Matt. 23:24) probably applies.

If God’s power which was active in Elisha is great enough to resuscitate even a dead person who was thrown into the tomb of the prophet (2 Kings 13:20ff.), then the bodily resurrection of a crucified Jew also would not be inconceivable. “Or have I no power to deliver?” (Isa. 50:2), asks the Lord of those who are hard of believing.

[*The Resurrection of Jesus* pp.123-131]

At last we can speak freely and openly with one another. In previous Christian-Jewish conversations, when they did occur, the separate roles were strictly adhered to. Christians took the religious ‘offensive’; they determined the themes, fixed the agenda, set the tone of every double monolog [sic], and staged disputation

and compulsory conversation. Jews, on the other hand, remained on the defensive, polemical one moment, apologetic the next, but always limited to saying *no*: no to Christology, no to the resurrection, and a capital NO to Paul.

Today triumphal omnipotence no longer characterises the churches, nor secular impotence the Jews. As a result, coercion by a majority and the fear of reprisal no longer curtail freedom of speech; thus an honest exchange of opinions is possible.

[*Jesus in Two Perspectives* p.17-18]

He [Jesus] did not publicly appear as such [the messiah]... He expressly forbade his disciples and all those who knew him to reveal the secret of his passion... He repeatedly avoided all acclamation by the people, often withdrawing ‘to a place apart’ in order to seek solitude; and he performed most of his healings under the seal of strict secrecy... His parables concerning salvation conceal rather than reveal the coming kingdom of Heaven... the greater majority of the Jewish people of the time neither believed in Jesus nor could have become ‘Christians’ because they had never heard anything at all about Jesus... If Jesus was not the Messiah of Israel, the portrayal of Judaism by the church, its teaches, exegetes, and catechists requires a fundamental revision... Those who read the Gospels with Jewish eyes cannot avoid the impression that Jesus was not only the victim of a judicial murder, but that after his death he also fell prey to the biblical fidelity of his evangelists. It is due primarily to their editorial adeptness that more than 60 passages and prophetic words in the Hebrew Bible were twisted to prove Jesus’ messiahship at every turn.

[*Jesus in Two Perspectives* p.45-48]

[A]ccording to Luke, “he [Jesus] went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read” (Luke 4:16) – a practice Jesus himself confirms, “I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together: (John 18:20), and which is verified by his use of the synagogue as a primary center for proclaiming the gospel.

[*Jesus in Two Perspectives* p.59]

I know of no other figure in Jewish antiquity whose popularity and public acclaim has been attested so often and so convincingly. The same can be said of the unavoidable darker sides of life. On the whole they portray exceptions to the respect and friendship which are as a rule shown him. On one occasion people “laughed at him” (Mark 5:38); some were offended by him (Mark 6:2). He knew the proverbial disdain which every prophet experiences “among his own kin” (Mark 6:4); many of his fellow teachers rejected his often daring interpretations of Scripture, and here and there his words fell on deaf ears (Matt. 11:20ff.). All of these particulars serve only to underscore the impact of his teaching and the power of his preaching. None of Israel’s heroes of faith were ever without followers and friends – or rivals and opponents.

[*Jesus in Two Perspectives* p.67]

Despite all the controversies and debates – indeed, because of his untiring, often impetuous dialogs with scribes and fellow teachers, a method that is to this day still the best rabbinic way of determining truth and interpreting the Bible – Jesus’ faithfulness to the Torah in both word and deed remains the best-kept secret in the Synoptics.

[*Jesus in Two Perspectives* pp.91-92]

Any Jewish scholar who examines the New Testament will find that Jesus was undoubtedly a Jew – not just a marginal Jew, nor a lukewarm, pro-forma Jew, but a true Jew, whose spiritual roots rose out of the prophetic core of Israel’s faith, that he was closely related to the Pharisees, that he was a Galilean, and that, on top of everything else, he was a master in art of telling parables. But to maintain that he was only a Jew, or only a Pharisee, or nothing but a wandering preacher, would be the height of unbiblical arrogance... [W]hat he became after Easter Sunday for believing Jewish Christians and later for the Gentile Church in addition to and beyond this remains an untouchable prerogative of faith that belongs to the mystery of the church. “I do not know” – that is the only honest reply a Jew can give to the Christology of the church.

[*Jesus in Two Perspectives* pp.114-115]

For Judaism this being a light to all the peoples of the world means bearing witness... It does not presume to convert Gentiles to Judaism... The mandate has always meant leading Gentiles to the one God, but not taking them into the synagogue... It is our mission to proclaim monotheism, not Judaism. ‘Salvation is from the Jews’ (John 4:22), says the Johannine Jesus. It comes *from* Israel in order that it might go out *to* all peoples.

It was preached and promised by the prophets; it has been largely accomplished in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. So he must certainly have been more than the son of a Galilean carpenter who merely called into being a movement of repentance. What this *more* was, I do not know...

The Gentile world at Jesus' time was crowded with divine men, sons of gods, and demi-gods, whose task it was to mediate between heaven and earth. God's pedagogy, as the medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides taught, made use of trusted thought-patterns and traditional practices gradually to lead humanity to higher insights.

Is it not conceivable that this pedagogy should enable the post-Easter Nazarene to become in all places the recognised mediator (in Greek dress) in order through him 'to eradicate idolatry in the world' and by means of the exalted Christ 'to bring the knowledge of God to the farthest islands?' [Maimonides]

[*Jesus in Two Perspectives* pp.115-116]

PHOTOCOPIES

Claude Montefiore (1858-1938)

- C.G. Montefiore, 'The Synoptic Gospels and the Jewish Consciousness' in *Hibbert Journal*, III (1904–05).
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 C.G. Montefiore, 'What a Jew Thinks About Jesus' in *Hibbert Journal*, XXXIII (1934–35).

Montefiore's background: Anglo-Jewish biblical scholar and philanthropist, educated at Oxford under the Anglican minister Benjamin Jowett. Together with Lily Montagu, Montefiore founded Liberal Judaism in Britain. He was the first president of the World Union of Progressive Judaism and also President of the Anglo-Jewish Association (an important communal representative body concerned with foreign affairs) from 1895–1921, that is, during a period of growing European anti-Semitism and the rise of Zionism. In terms of scholarship he was unusual for his interest in Christianity and the New Testament, and his hopes for Liberal Judaism appeared to assume an amalgamation of the best of Judaism and Christianity. He is best known for *The Synoptic Gospels*, a two volume translation and commentary, and for *A Rabbinic Anthology*, a thematic selection of rabbinic ethical teaching.

Categorizing Jesus: Jesus was a Prophet 'of the eighth-century BC type' yet lived after the establishment of the Law (OJ 102-103). His prophetic credentials lay in his inwardness and intense spirituality and by his emphasis on ethical teaching which was heroic, pro-active, and both altruistic and self-regarding (SE 105). Jesus also regarded himself as the messiah, the head of the coming Kingdom (SJ 777). Jesus was not a nationalist, but rather someone who stressed Jewish universalism (SJ 775)

Jesus and the Law: Jesus' occasional criticisms relating to the Law result from preaching the Prophets' message in an age of Law (SE 41). He was generally in accordance with the Law (SJ 770-772). Jesus appeared to accept the written Law but rejected some interpretations of it according to the principle that the performance of ritual should never be at the cost of deeds of love and the higher law of righteousness and compassion (OJ 103).

The Question of Originality: Jesus' teaching was very close to the Pharisees/Rabbis and many differences (regarding grace, human effort, freewill, human weakness, repentance, and views of non-Israelites) had been over-exaggerated (OJ 99, 102). Perhaps some of Jesus' teachings had chronological priority, but Montefiore regarded relative emphasises as more significant in terms of originality; the general spirit of his teaching was original (OJ 104, 109), as was his enabling of universalism (SJ 772-773). Jesus' character was original (OJ 101) and felt God's nearness with an intensity unsurpassed by anyone else (SE 88-90), emphasised self-denial (OJ 101, 105), was attracted to marginal groups (OJ 101), Uniquely, Montefiore spoke positively of teachings he regarded as off main line of Jewish development (OJ 98-99, 106-107). Jesus' personal authority set him apart (SJ 776).

Comments:

- Montefiore was keen to use Jesus - and his non-Jewish or original contributions - as a means by which to justify his own Liberal Jewish concerns.
- Unusually, Montefiore approached the question of originality from the perspective of emphasis, rather than specific teachings or personality.
- Montefiore was attacked as a crypto-Christian and repeatedly defended himself by maintaining that he did not regard Jesus as perfect or worthy of worship.

SEE PHOTOCOPY