

aces in the modern world, it is not likely that all mankind will ever come under the spiritual sway of one special religion. Nor would this be a desirable state of affairs. People are individuals who are extremely diverse in their rates of progress and in their stages of spiritual development: each person needs a belief which accords with his own particular spiritual state, and each different path has its own special merits. It will be discovered by the sincere seeker after truth that although the orthodox beliefs of religions appear to differ widely from each other, yet the mystic who truly perceives with the inner eye of his soul, the perfect light of reality, is no longer concerned with differences between so-called "divinity" or so-called "humanity," nor with the superiority of one teacher over another. By whatever path the mystic may have reached the light, he will be able to see, as the Guru says, "The current of truth running through all religions." This being so, there is no justification for any one religious group to claim that theirs is the only true way to salvation and that it is only by following their particular master that all mankind can be saved. Thus, I firmly believe that God is merciful and loving toward all human beings, whether or not they believe in the finality of Christ. In the words of the Fifth Guru, Arjan, who died for the Sikh faith:

He is a forgiving God; kind to the distressed,
Responsive to love, and merciful always.
The Divine Herdsman places Himself at the head of His
straying flock,
And feeds them, one and all.
He is the Primal Being, the Cause of all causes, the
Creator,
The very breath of life to those who love Him.
Whoever worships Him is cleansed,
And is attached to love and devotion.

We are low, ignorant and devoid of virtue,
But we have come to Thy protection, O Lord of all
resources.

A Jew Looks at Jesus

"Who do you say that I am?" Jesus asked of his disciples (Matt. 16:15), and this question, which led to Peter's confession of faith, still remains a crucial question, for the Jew no less than for the gentile, today no less than nineteen hundred years ago. It is this question I should like to discuss here. Speaking as a Jew, from out of what I take to be the authentic tradition of Jewish faith, what can I say about Jesus, the man of Nazareth whom Peter hailed as the Christ?

I

Jesus was, first of all, a great and incomparable moral teacher. Of that there cannot be, and indeed never has been, any doubt. His exhortations and discourses stand unrivaled in the ethical literature of mankind. Men of all cultures and religions have paid tribute to the inexhaustible truth and power of his moral teaching. The Sermon on the Mount is known wherever men anywhere have concerned themselves with the moral life, and nowhere has it failed to stir the imagination and raise the heart to the self-giving love which Jesus preached. By the common testimony of mankind, this Jewish rabbi from Nazareth nineteen hundred years ago reached the high-water mark of moral vision and ethical teaching.

But if that were all there was to it, there would be no question to ask and no problem to discuss. For, as a moral teacher, Jesus stands merely as one among many, one of the rabbis of Judaism, entirely in the line of rabbinical tradition. Scholars,

both Jewish and non-Jewish, have shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that all his moral teachings, even the most exalted, have their sources and parallels in the contemporary religious literature of the Jews, from whom he sprang and among whom he taught. It is not enough to point to the consummate synthesis that this teacher of genius achieved in his teaching. This may be granted, but it is not simply, or even primarily, as a moral teacher that Jesus confronts us as a problem and a challenge. As a moral teacher, he is a Jewish rabbi of great power and insight, drawing upon the traditional wisdom of his people. That is a great deal, but it is not enough to answer the question we are asking. We must look further.

Jesus was, on the next level, in the line of the prophets of Israel. If the prophet is the God-possessed man standing over against the community to which he belongs, bringing to bear upon it the word of the Lord in judgment and promise, then Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet in Israel, in the succession of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea. His denunciations of the corruptions and idolatries of the age, his call to repentance, his promise of divine grace for those of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, his proclamation of the new age to come as judgment and fulfillment, follows, as it was meant to follow, the pattern of the great prophets. There is, indeed, something new because of the new situation; but this newness, this speaking out of and to the condition of the time, is precisely what characterizes the living word of prophecy. Jesus, the rabbinic teacher, is also among the prophets of Israel, with clear affinities to the great prophets of the past.

But again, if that were all there was to it, there would be no question to ask and no problem to discuss, for again, neither as prophet nor as moral teacher is Jesus anything more than one among many. It is not here that his uniqueness, if uniqueness there be, is to be discovered. Jesus' prophetic proclamations

follow the prophetic word of his predecessors; his denunciations of the self-righteous "scribes and Pharisees" can be abundantly paralleled in the literature of rabbinic self-criticism; the promise he held out of divine mercy for the repentant sinner was a promise which every contemporary Jew could understand even if he could not prevail upon himself to take hold of it. No, not here can we find the answer to our question—we must look still further.

II

The Jesus that confronts us as a problem is the Jesus whom Peter confessed the Christ and whom the Fourth Gospel represents as declaring: "I am the way . . . ; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). What can a Jew make of this confession and this claim?

It seems to me obvious that this claim and this confession have no meaning outside the context of the faith of Israel, as defined in the Hebrew Bible, in which Judaism and Christianity alike are grounded. The persistent attempt through the centuries to throw out the Old Testament and replace it with some other so-called "preparation for the gospel," such as Greek philosophy, Hindu mysticism, or modern science, is inevitably and inescapably, however unwittingly, an attempt to destroy the biblical substance of the Christian faith, and to convert Christianity into a pagan salvation cult. Christian faith is biblical and Hebraic, or it is nothing at all.

Viewing it from the biblical-Hebraic standpoint, and in the light of a biblically defined understanding of God's redemptive purpose, what can a Jew say of the Christian church and the Christ it proclaims? It is hard to avoid the conviction that Christianity emerges, in God's plan of redemption, to open the covenant of Israel to the "nations of the world." In biblical

faith it is in and through membership in the covenanted people of God that—humanly speaking—man has his standing with God and can avail himself of God's grace for redemption. "The individual Israelite," Alan Richardson has pointed out, "approaches God in virtue of his membership in the holy people. . . . In the whole of the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as the New, there is no such thing as a private personal relation between an individual and God apart from this membership in the covenantfolk."¹ Man's relation to God is essentially responsive; it is God's call, expressed in the grace of election, that gives man the possibility—from his side—of entering into personal relations with God. (Modern existentialism, in its very welcome emphasis on personal confrontation, has tended to forget that such confrontation is, humanly speaking, possible only *within*, and on the basis of, the covenant.) In the biblical view people outside the covenant, properly called gentiles, cannot—apart from the uncovenanted grace of God—of themselves find their way to God or meet him in personal encounter. In our modern intellectualistic, and therefore inadequate, terminology this is equivalent to saying that only the religion of Israel brings men to God; other, pagan religions, the "religions of the world," lead men away from him.

The covenant of Israel is understood by the prophets, and perhaps much earlier, as the covenant of a redeemed and redeeming community; the purpose it defines is a universal purpose, and the people it brings into being are an instrument of God for the redemption of mankind. All are to be gathered into the covenant, and within the covenant restored to a right relation to God. It is in this context that the Jew finds it possible to understand the providential role of the church, and the church to understand the never-failing providential function

¹ "Instrument of God," *Interpretation*, III (1949), 278.

of Jewry. Through Christ God's covenant with Israel is—in the fullness of time—opened to all mankind. As the one by whom and through whom the covenant of Israel is opened to mankind, Christ appears in early Christian thinking as, quite literally, an incarnate or one-man Israel. Through union in faith with him the gentile believer, the pagan of yesterday, becomes part of Israel; he therefore comes under the covenant, and thereby becomes heir to the promise of God to Israel. "If you are Christ's," Paul says, "then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the gentiles through Jesus Christ"; that is how the apostle describes this aspect of Christ's redemptive work (Gal. 3:14, KJV). He admonishes recent gentile converts:

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. . . . But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near . . . so [that] you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:12-19).

Solomon Groyzel, a modern Jewish writer, has—I think quite correctly—put what he takes to be Paul's meaning in these words: "He so broadened the term 'Jew' as to include in it . . . all those who transformed their lives by being faithful Christians."

Attempting to understand what has happened in terms of the divine purpose, the Jew can see Christ as he in whom God was, and is, acting for the redemption of the peoples. Through Christ a new covenant community is created—the church, the "Body of Christ." Through Christ Israel's redemptive history becomes the redemptive history of the pagan-turned-Christian, who becomes in effect an Israelite. "Through Jesus Christ," H.

Richard Niebuhr points out, "Christians of all races recognize the Hebrews as their fathers. . . . All that has happened to that strange and wandering people of God becomes part of their own past."²

Christian faith thus brings into being and defines a new covenant; but it is new not in the sense of supplanting the old, but in the sense of extending and enlarging it, very much as we speak of the new world side-by-side with the old. For with the emergence of Christianity the election and vocation of Israel are not annulled, nor does the church supersede the people of the "old covenant." The notion that it does not only renders unintelligible the survival of Jewry these nineteen hundred years; it is itself a manifestation of that spiritual pride, the pride of supersession, that goes a long way toward corrupting the meaning and power of the gospel that is proclaimed. The election of Israel remains, and its vocation remains, though it assumes a very different form in the Christian world from that which it possessed in the pre-Christian.

It is in terms of this conception of the double covenant, that the Jew can see Jesus on the level of his uniqueness. He is indeed the way—the way by and through which the peoples of the world may enter the covenant of Israel and come to serve the God of Israel, who is the Creator of the universe and the Lord of all being. "Israel," Franz Rosenzweig, the great Jewish religious philosopher, has said, "can bring the world to God only through Christianity."³ And this "Christianity" is, of course, the extension into history of the Jesus whom Peter hailed as the Christ.

But there is also the other side of the medal. "Christianity,"

² *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 115-16.

³ Franz Rosenzweig: *His Life and Thought*, Nahum Glatzer, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. 341.

Rosenzweig continues, "could not long remain a force for redemption without the Jew in its midst,"⁴ and what that means can best be seen in the words of Paul Tillich, who speaks from the Christian commitment:

It is important that there always be Judaism. It is the corrective against the paganism that goes along with Christianity The Church is always in danger of adoring the gods of space in which she is ruling The church is always in danger of losing her prophetic spirit Therefore the prophetic spirit included in the traditions of the Synagogue is needed so long as the gods of space are in power, and that means to the end of history.⁵

Against all idolatries, Judaism proclaims: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone"; and this is a word which the church as well as the world, and the church because it is so immersed in the world, never ceases to need. Judaism's witness to the living God, which it is compelled to bear by its divine calling as that is expressed in history, is a witness that cannot end until all things are brought to the end of judgment and fulfillment.

Yes, each needs the other: Judaism needs Christianity, and Christianity needs Judaism. The vocation of both can be defined in common terms: to bear witness to the living God amidst the idolatries of the world. But, since the emergence of the church, and through the emergence of the church, this vocation has, as it were, been split into two parts. The Jew fulfills his vocation by "staying with God," "giving the world no rest so long as the world has not God"—to recall Jacques Maritain's unforgettable phrase.⁶ The Christian can fulfill his

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Quoted in A. Roy Eckardt, *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1948), pp. 146-47.

⁶ *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question* (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1939), p. 29.

vocation only by "going out" to conquer the world for God. The Jew's vocation is to "stand," the Christian's to "go out"—both in the same cause of the kingdom of God. Judaism and Christianity thus represent one faith expressed in two religions—Judaism facing inward to the Jews, and Christianity facing outward to the gentiles, who, through it, are brought to the God, and under the covenant, of Israel, and therefore cease to be gentiles in the proper sense of the term. This is the unity of Judaism and Christianity, and this is why a Jew is able to see and acknowledge Jesus in his uniqueness as the way to the Father.

I know that what I say here will not satisfy those who are Christians, although they will, I hope, recognize its truth so far as it goes. And, indeed, it should not satisfy the Christian, since to the Christian, Jesus as the Christ must necessarily mean much more than he can possibly mean to the Jew. For the Jew sees Jesus as emerging from Israel and going forth; he sees him from the rear, as it were. The Christian, on the other hand, precisely because he is a Christian, will see Christ as coming toward him, in the fulness of divine grace, to claim, to judge, and to save; he meets him as Paul met him on the road to Damascus or as Peter outside Rome, face to face in confrontation. Yet this difference of perspective should not blind us to the fact that it is the same reality we see. And indeed—here again I quote Franz Rosenzweig—the two religions relate to the same truth, being equal representations of it—equal before God.⁷ With God, truth is one; but for men it is irreducibly split, since the truth as men see it is confessional and conditioned by one's community of faith. This is not a vicious relativism, nor does it assert for one moment that all religions are equally valid or equally true. On the contrary, as

⁷ Franz Rosenzweig, p. 341.

Rosenzweig puts it, man is either a pagan or a Jew or Christian.⁸ The pagan, as pagan, is outside the scope of the covenant—that is what being a pagan means—though God, in his mercy, may, of course, reach out to him. Jew and Christian, on the other hand, has each his assigned position, defined in the covenant that relates him to God. Their positions, their "standpoints," being different, their views of the one truth and the one reality will be different, although both will be views of the same truth and the same reality—just as two people standing in the same room but in different corners will see the room in different perspectives and therefore somewhat differently. Each will be loyal to the truth if he speaks out the truth as he sees it, though recognizing that his truth is never quite identical with the full truth of God. This approach does not derogate from the "finality" of either Judaism or Christianity, if that is properly understood; it merely prevents our making an idol of either; both are seen as instruments in the redemptive purpose of God, though each in a different way.

In short, each—the Jew on his part and the Christian on his—sees the truth as that is to be apprehended from his perspective, defined by his covenant and his vocation. Each must stand by his truth and confess it, recognizing that insofar as he does so in integrity and wholeness of heart, he remains faithful to the God whose truth it is. Naturally, since the two see the same reality in somewhat different ways, each may see an aspect of the truth hidden to the other, and even interpret the same truth differently. But perhaps that is part of God's purpose in placing the Jew and Christian on different sectors of the fighting front of the Kingdom, so that each may bear not only the common witness to God, but also a witness against the perils, inadequacies, and temptations of the other. The witness

⁸ *Ibid.*

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of Christianity against the legalistic, moralistic tendencies in Judaism is a witness for which the Jew must always be grateful. And the Christian, too, it seems to me, ought to see the value of the Jewish word in this dialogue. The Christian who tends to be impatient with the Jew for refusing to see in Jesus the fulfillment and completion of God's redemptive work might pause a moment to consider whether this Jewish "obstinacy" was not itself important as an indispensable reminder of the very incompleteness of this completion, of a redemption which may indeed have come but is nevertheless yet to come. The heart of each, Jew and Christian alike, may ache, perhaps, that the other is not in his camp, seeing things his way and fighting side-by-side with him on his sector of the front; but he ought also to recognize that though the other fights on a different sector, he is also fighting the same battle for the same God, and that it is perhaps by the providence of God that they are thus separated.

III

This, then, is how a Jew may see Jesus and the faith and church built upon the confession of him as the Christ. I realize how difficult it is for one to communicate what he has to say on this matter. "Christ," Franz Kafka, the Jew, once exclaimed, "is an abyss filled with light; one must close one's eyes if one is not to fall into it."⁹ And yet speak one must. In Jesus—not merely Jesus the moral teacher, Jesus the prophetic voice, but also the Jesus whom Christians confess the Christ—Jew and Christian find their unity . . . and their difference. In answering the question, "Who do you say that I am?" Jew and Christian stand separated yet united. The unity far transcends the separa-

⁹ Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1953), p. 93.

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tion, however real that may be; for the two are united in their common allegiance to the living God and in their common expectation of, and longing for, the One who is to come—for the Christian, the One who came and is to come again, for the Jew the One who is promised to Israel, but for both the same Promised One. In this one faith and hope, Jew and Christian—to recall Paul Tillich's words—stand united until the end of time in the struggle for the Lord of history against the pagan and idolatrous powers that threaten to overwhelm us on every side.