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Russell, Growth, IBS 11, April 1989

The Growth of Christianity over the first Five Centuries  
in the Light of Jewish Faith /1

E.A. Russell

It is a special privilege to be invited by the Irish School of Ecumenics and the Irish Council of Christians and Jews to share in this annual Conference especially as it takes place in the Jewish Museum. I have happy memories of visits here on other occasions. The theme offered to me covers an extensive period, reaching from the date of the birth of Jesus, say, in 6 BC and culminating in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD - a formidable task for the narrow confines of one lecture. /2 For my purpose the concentration will be rather on the earlier centuries especially where they become definitive for the later period.

Christianity was born within Judaism. It took over what Dr Cecil Roth calls "Hebrew's greatest gift to humanity", the concept of one God, Creator of earth. As such, it spelt an end to polytheism and, as he expresses it, "The ideas of the value of human life, the sanctity of the home and the dignity of the marital relationship.....are essentially a biblical heritage" /3 It is scarcely necessary to add that such ideas are precisely what characterizes Christianity. We might further add that the God of Israel was a God of righteousness and again and again the Hebrew prophets express this passion for righteousness i.e., justice, truth and morality. Isaiah speaks for the prophets when he says:

Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me...  
Your new moons and appointed feasts, my soul hates;  
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil; learn to do good;  
seek justice, correct oppression;  
defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. (1.13,14,16-17)

He highlights also that such a God is a God of mercy, of enduring love. It was in the context of such a faith that Jesus was born.

For information about Jesus our main sources are of course the Christian Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. It is here we get impressive confirmation of the

Jewishness of Jesus. It is notable that we do not get much information about the historical Jesus in the epistles of Paul - his stress lies on the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus - or indeed other epistles. It may be presumed of course their readers would have a basic knowledge of the historical Jesus.

Jewish scholars have been fascinated with the story of Jesus, the Jew. They include scholars of a past generation, e.g., C.G. Montefiore /4 and Joseph Klausner/5 and, more recently, Dr Geza Vermes, Professor David Flusser and the American scholar, Dr Samuel Sandmel. /6

The name "Jesus" /7 is an English transliteration of the Greek form. The original Hebrew form was Joshua or, more fully, Yehoshuah (= "Yahweh is salvation" or "Yahweh saves" or "will save"). The significance of the name was not overlooked by Matthew: "You will call his name Jesus (Joshua) for he will save his people from their sins"(1.21). Such a name is, of course, thoroughly Jewish. Further, Matthew gives us his family tree, noting that it goes back to Abraham, the supreme example to the Jews of the complete Hebrew, the Father of the Faithful.

The evidence suggests that Jesus was brought up in an observant Jewish home i.e., a home that adhered to the Jewish law. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus' father is described as dikaios, "righteous" i.e., as one who is faithful to the law of righteousness, the Torah. We have confirmation of this: Jesus was circumcized on the eight day as laid down by the law (Luke 2.21); he was offered as the first-born to God in the Temple and redeemed or bought back by the required gift from the parents of five shekels (Exodus 13:1-2, 11-15; Numbers 17.10). Dr Wm Manson writes: "The scrupulousness with which this rite and the other requirements of the Mosaic law are said to have been observed reminds us not merely that Christ was 'born under the law', but that Christianity is the fulfilment of Judaism". /8 Jesus was fortunate to be born in the era of the synagogue, a Jewish institution going back to Babylon perhaps as early as the sixth century BC. /9 It was set up for the reading of scripture and for prayer. It was at times simply called proseuchē, "prayer". The tradition of scripture reading and

exposition and prayer is taken over by the Christian Church over the centuries. Jesus, we read, faithfully attended the synagogue on the Sabbath day "as his custom was." (Lk 4.16)

The portrait presented to us by Matthew shows a Jesus who holds strictly to the law. This is evident when he speaks about adherence to the law which some alleged perhaps he was breaking. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." (5.17). When he comes to expand the full meaning of the Hebrew law, the way he speaks reminds us of the "Thus saith the Lord" of the prophets: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old but I say to you" (Mt 5.21,27ff). Jesus' adherence to the law comes out on numerous occasions e.g., he is not content that the leper has been cleansed but insists that he follow out the instruction of the law and show himself to the priest to certify the cure (Mk 1.41ff). It is Matthew also who shows us that Jesus confines his mission to the Jew. "I have been sent", says Jesus, "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (15.24) On the matter of faithful observance of the Sabbath regulations, the only area where he appears to break it has to do with healing, e.g. the man with the withered hand. (Mk 3.1-6 and par.) /10

At every point, it would appear, we are confronted with a Jesus who is shaped by the traditions of his people even if he interprets them in a fresh and original way. The radical teaching of the so-called "Sermon on the Mount (Luke stages it on a plain) has parallels in the best thought of Jesus' day. Some of the sayings are of course taken almost straight from the Hebrew scriptures. When Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (5.5), he recalls Psalm 37 vs 11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth and delight themselves in abundant prosperity." When he says "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (5.8), he recalls Psalm 24. 3-5: "Who shall ascend into the hill of God or who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing

from the Lord." Even the literary form "blessed..." shows its debt to the original Hebrew. There it is an exclamation, "Oh, the blessedness of" found e.g., in Psalm 1.1: "Oh the blessedness of the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly" where it may be, since the Psalm is placed at the beginning of the Psalms, it is implied that the theme of the Psalms has to do with the blessed or happy man i.e., the godly. Another example of this literary form can be located in Psalm 32.1: "Oh the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." /11

And what about the Lord's Prayer or the so-called Pater Noster? /12 It is claimed that it "appears to be an epitome....an abbreviated version of the Eighteen Benedictions." /13 The Jewish scholar I. Abrahams, in his two-volume work, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels (reprinted., New York, 1967; II, 98-99), has culled lines from various Jewish prayers to shape the following mosaic with its many echoes of the phrases in the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thine exalted Name  
in the world thou didst create according to Thy will.

May thy Kingdom and Thy Lordship come speedily,  
and be acknowledged by all the world, that Thy Name may be praised  
in all eternity.

May Thy will be done in Heaven, and also on earth give tranquillity  
of spirit to those that fear Thee, yet in all things do what seemeth  
good to Thee.

Let us enjoy the bread daily apportioned to us.

Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned; forgive also all who have  
done us injury; even as we also forgive all.

And lead us not into temptation, but keep us far from evil.

For Thine is the greatness and the power and the dominion, the victory  
and the majesty, yea in all Heaven and on earth.

Thine is the Kingdom, and Thou art lord of all beings for ever. Amen

Abrahams insists that if the Lord's prayer was "composed under the inspiration of Hebraic ideas, modelled to a large extent on Jewish forms, it was not in its primitive form a mosaic but a whole and fresh design." /14 The special quality of the prayer may be described as its simplicity and intimacy, its compactness and its manner of looking to the future. /15

The summary of Jesus' message as presented in Matthew lays stress on repentance: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven

has drawn near." (4.17; cf Mark 1.15; Mt 3.2). There are in this brief sentence no less than three Jewish aspects we may note. 1. The prophets often spoke of the day of the Lord and looked forward to the time when God's sovereign rule would be consummated. Obadiah e.g., speaks of the day of the Lord being near among all the nations (vs 15): "Saviours shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau and the Kingdom shall be the Lord's." (vs21) In Habakkuk we find the words of promise, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas." (2.14) 2. Matthew uses the plural "heavens" as well as the singular probably to avoid using the name of God, and reflecting Jesus' own usage. This reminds us of the Jewish practice when reading the Hebrew scriptures to avoid using the so-called tetragrammaton, i.e. the personal name of the God of Israel written in the Hebrew Bible with the four consonants YHWH, When reading, the substitute Adonai (The Lord) is used. Jesus also shows us his typically Jewish reverence for God by using passives in the Beatitudes. to avoid the name of God. 3. Repent. George F. Moore, in his major work of Judaism, describes repentance as "the Jewish doctrine of salvation." /16 He illustrates such repentance by quoting from the Presbyterian "Shorter Catechism": "repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God (in Christ), doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience." (question 87)

It must become evident that Jesus was thoroughly a Jew. The tendency for Christian exposition is to play down the Jewishness of Jesus and, whatever Jesus says or does, to ignore those aspects that are distinctively Jewish. We have little or no evidence that Jesus disregarded the food laws of his people though he did take a radical stand on a number of issues just as the OT prophets might have done. For him the Hebrew scriptures were authoritative in a penetrating way where murder becomes hate and adultery lust. Above all, he centred the whole of the law on the two great commandments:"You shall love the Lord your God with

all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (Matt 22.37-40; 7.12 and par.) In so doing, however, Jesus was just reflecting the best thought of his day. "In the Pharisee liturgy, the passage cited by Jesus, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one lord. And thou shalt love....' (Deut.6.4-5) was made the centre of the whole liturgy" /17 The Rabbi Akiba singled out love for one's neighbour as "the greatest principle in the law" (Sifre 89b). Jesus, like other Pharisee teachers of the period, was not announcing an independent moral principle, but commenting on the basic teaching of the Hebrew scriptures. /18

We have thus far pointed out the Jewishness of Jesus and have shown as far as our limited time permits something of his indebtedness to his own Jewish traditions. Like the prophets he proclaimed the near coming of the kingdom of God. Unlike the Rabbis whose students selected their teacher, Jesus called his disciples. Unlike the Rabbis also, he chose them to share in his mission. The choice of twelve disciples may or may not be significant of Jesus' intention to found a new Israel. At any rate, the Matthaean Jesus on Peter's confession of him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God", declares that on the rock of such a confession of faith he will build his church. (Mt 16.18) The question may, then, be asked since our concern is with the growth of Christianity, "how successful was the mission of Jesus?" Did he do any better than the prophets in his proclamation of the need for repentance? It would appear that in the end the results were disappointing. It is not unlikely that the Pharisees in particular came to grasp the meaning of what Jesus was really saying and doing, and understood it as a threat to their authority and dominance. If it is true that the ordinary people, the so-called "people of the land" had their sympathies primarily with the Pharisees, then the crowds that gathered round Jesus in Galilee would presumably be in their number. /19 At first flocking round Jesus, they appear in the main to have faded away. In the early source, Q, of the gospels, we find Jesus saying,

"Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty acts done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago sitting in dust and ashes. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades." (Lk 10.13,15 and par.) The three towns mentioned here, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum form a triangle at the North-West corner of lake Galilee. Here Jesus' ministry was concentrated. Far from being a success, running through Luke's gospel and on occasions in Acts, there is a note of pathos especially in relation to the Jewish people at the repudiation of Jesus' ministry. It is anticipated in the nativity account where Lk notes there was no room for Jesus in the inn. (Lk 2.7) It is underlined in the unique story of Jesus' visit to the synagogue in his own home town of Nazareth where he narrowly escaped being killed. Nor must we forget the courageous and compassionate approach to a Samaritan village where again Jesus was turned away. Indeed Jesus' lament suggests frequent unsuccessful visits to Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood, and you would not!" (Mt 23.37 and par.). It is poignantly significant that after the resurrection and at Pentecost, the church numbered only 120 persons.

When we come to the book of the Acts of the Apostles so-called (it is rather "The Acts of the Holy Spirit?"), the picture is, in contrast, one of remarkable growth. As Jesus began his ministry in the Nazareth synagogue by a reference to the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so Luke again stresses the centrality of the Holy Spirit at the inauguration of the Church. While, however, Jesus is rejected, here the Holy Spirit's descent gives the disciples power, boldness and utterance, bringing about response from the thousands of Jews, including God-fearers and proselytes though not without problems and conflicts especially with the Jewish authorities. Stephen, one of the so-called "deacons", a Greek-speaking Diaspora Jew, aggravated the authorities by what appeared to be an attack on the Temple. He was accused

of blasphemy and stoned to death (the circumstances of his death recall that of Jesus).

It is important to realize that this whole struggle is a struggle within Judaism at this stage, the notable difference being that the church insists on proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. The outstanding convert - a fact underlined by three accounts of his conversion in Acts (chs 9,22,26) - was one who remained a practising Jew, we believe all his life, i.e., Paul (Saul), a Pharisee born of Pharisees, educated Acts tells us at the feet of the great Gamaliel 1, a diaspora Jew from Tarsus and previously among the fiercest persecutors of the church. The ongoing mission of the church was helped by the presence of synagogues in so many of the towns they entered. As Jews, the apostles could generally enter without much trouble and it gave them the opportunity to preach Jesus as the Christ, not always, however with acceptance. Even so, there is no doubt that without a ready platform in the synagogues, the mission would have been greatly hindered. At this period, the Jerusalem apostles attended Jewish services whether in the Temple or synagogue. In addition they shared in worship and the breaking of bread in houses opened to them.

As a result of the persecution that followed the death of Stephen, the Greek-speaking or diaspora Jews were compelled to leave Jerusalem. These included Philip, one of the seven administrators of the poor fund. This administrator proved to be an effective evangelist to the Samaritans, the half-Jews who were generally despised, even hated, by the stricter type of Jew because their forbears had intermarried with non-Jews. The Samaritan mission was markedly successful. A major problem, however, arose about the mission to non-Jews. Were they to be admitted without insisting on circumcision and adherence to the food laws? A provisional decision was made by the Council which met at Jerusalem to allow Gentiles into the community on condition that they kept themselves from immorality, from eating meat offered to idols, from things strangled or from blood. It is probable that at least one reason why they were allowed to remain at Jerusalem and were not subject to persecution was that they remained practising

Jews and kept the hours of prayer in the Temple.

Over the period from 45 to 300 AD conversions to Christianity were widespread throughout the Mediterranean world but especially among the Jews. The towns where such conversions were extensive contained large Jewish populations. They are set out for us by Martin Gilbert: /20 They include 1. Egypt: Alexandria and Pelusium; 2. Cyrenaica (North Africa): Berenice, Barca and Cyrene; 3. Greece: Corinth, Thessalonica, Sparta; 4. Islands: Cyprus, Rhodes and a large part of Crete; 5. Syria (Roman Province): Jerusalem, Caesarea, Tyre and Sidon, Damascus and Antioch; 6. Western Asia Minor: Ephesus, Pergamum, Philadelphia etc (cf. Revelation chs 2,3); 7. Areas of Paul's missionary activity: Tarsus, Perga, Iconium and Ancyra.

Up to this point we have sought to emphasize the Jewish roots of the church whether in Jesus or in the inauguration of the church at Pentecost and the subsequent growth. We have noted the points of conflict, Jesus in his relations with the Jewish authorities, his death, the martyrdom of Stephen and the subsequent persecution spear-headed by Paul.

In 64AD, the first Roman persecution of the Christians took place under Nero, probably as a result of the accusations of Jews in Rome. The Christians were accused by the so-called "public rumour" of having set fire to the city. Tradition has it, as we know, that Peter and Paul died in this persecution. From 66AD, after the Roman forces of Vespasian laid siege to Jerusalem, Judeo-Christians left Jerusalem to seek refuge at Pella. /21 In 70AD Jerusalem fell. The Temple was destroyed and the leaders of Palestinian Judaism took refuge with Jochanan ben Zakkai at Jamnia (Javneh). This event marked the first break between Jews and Christians. Jews regarded the Judeo-Christians as traitors. The situation was complicated for the Christians by the fact that Palestinian Judaism was engaged in a violent engagement with the Roman power, a conflict with which Judeo-Christians refused to identify. The result was that the links were cut with Palestinian Judaism. It is notable that the meeting of Jewish leaders at Jamnia - the same

meeting which apparently gave authoritative decision on the books of the Hebrew scriptures viz., Torah, Prophets and Writings - appears to have accepted the break with Judeo-Christians when it forbade the Jew of the Greek diaspora to read the bible in the Septuagint (Greek) version, that largely used by Christians. Further, the attitude of the Pharisaic schools may be reflected in the addition to the prayers of the synagogue, known as the Birkath-ha-Minim. It was intended to prevent Judeo-Christians coming to the synagogue and runs as follows: (though the actual text is debated): "for the excommunicate let there be no hope and the arrogant government do thou swiftly uproot in our days; and may the Christians and the heretics suddenly be laid low and not be inscribed with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant." /22 Dr G.D. Kilpatrick brings in other evidence alongside the Birkath-ha-Minim to argue "that the Rabbinic leaders in our period were taking active measures against Jewish Christianity. These consisted in exclusion from the synagogue, from religious, and perhaps, all intercourse, in prohibition of Christian literature, and in propaganda against Jesus and the church's claim on his behalf." /23 Support for this is also taken from some writings in the NT, all written in the second half of the first century e.g., the strongest enmity is found in the book of Revelation, in John's Gospel and that of Matthew. /24

Another vital question for our study has to be: how did the church reach the judgment that Jesus was God? There is no doubt that the subject of "Jesus, the Jew". has continued to fascinate the writers and readers of modern Judaism, yet the one crucial point on which there is a clear parting of the ways is the eventual claim that Jesus was God. There are fairly obvious reasons for this: 1. Judaism prided itself on its monotheism, expressed daily in the recited Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One." (Deut 6.4) 2. Jesus was a crucified criminal. Further, in the law, he was adjudged cursed for it stands written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs upon a tree." (Deut.27.26). 3. The Jewish authorities were further enraged by the claim that Jesus rose from the dead seen as a corollary to, or confirmation of, his divinity. 4 The Hebrew scriptures

foretold a coming Messiah but not one who would be divine. 5; Finally, (cf 1) it was an affront of the most sacrilegious and blasphemous kind against the wholly other, the one and only holy God.

How, then, did Jewish monotheists come to believe that Jesus was God? Did they have it from the beginning or was it something that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they gradually came to understand? In the early credal formulae we have to admit to a primitive view which suggested that Jesus became something at the resurrection that he was not before, e.g., Romans 1.3:

"who was descended from David according to the flesh and installed Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead." /25

Something of the same takes place in the Pentecostal speech of Peter: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2.36) /26

The pre-Pauline formula of Romans 1.3 is comparable to another in the letter to the Philippians at 2.5-11 :

"Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is notable that there is no mention of the resurrection here though it may be implicit. We may note the suggestion of reward: "Therefore...". "highly exalted", "Bestowed on Him", even the suggestion that Jesus became something that he was not previously. Note, however, also, that whatever is given Jesus it is to the glory of God, the Father. /27

It becomes clear that the church has had to grapple in various ways with the complex mystery of the person of Christ. One way was to explain away the humanity of Christ, a docetism traces of which are especially clear in the Fourth Gospel and in 1 John. A pivotal passage is often located in Mark, the confession at Caesarea-Philippi. Peter declares "You are the Christ", a confession with an imperfect understanding but not to be minimized for all that. (8.29). There is of course no implication of divinity in it, however the church might later understand it. In Matthew, the confessional form is longer and more liturgical, not to say more christological. (16.16) In the synoptic Gospels there is no evidence that Jesus made any claim to be divine, a restraint that is all the more remarkable in the light of the developed faith of the Church. It is in the Fourth Gospel, however, that we get the clearest statement that Jesus is divine: "In the beginning was the Logos (Word) and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was with God." (Jn 1.1). It assumes pre-existence or rather coexistence, the verb ēn implying "was and continued to be God." The ego eimi, ("I am") characterizes important self-revelatory statements of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, reminding us of the "I am" of Exodus 3.14 and Isaiah 43.10. /28 It is also in the Fourth Gospel that we get the peak of confessions in the NT where the disciple Thomas declares, "My Lord and my God." (20.28)

The battle for the conviction, "Jesus is God" was not an easy one. We can only deal here with the chief heresy that denied the true divinity of Jesus was propagated by a priest called Arius. He came forward in 319 AD and propagated a view that came to be known as Arianism. It was not until 381 that his view was finally rejected by the Council of Constantinople. His view was that the Son of God was not eternal. Rather, he was created by the Father from Nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world. Therefore he was not God by nature but a changeable creature. The division caused by this teaching in the church forced Constantinople to convene the Council of Nicaea in 325. They drew up the Nicene Creed, traditionally linked with the celebration of the church's

eucharist. It has in it an affirmation which reflects the christological conflict. The definitive phrases on Jesus are:

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from light, begotten not made, one in Being with the Father.

These sentences from the Nicene Creed represent essentially the faith of the church today.

There is a tragic corollary to this assertion of Jesus as divine. It comes from a reading back into the gospel accounts of the Passion of such an understanding of Jesus as God. The absurd but, in the light of subsequent anti-semitism, deadly claim was that the "Jews" at the passion knowingly killed God. How could "Jews" at this stage discern in Jesus God? Not even the disciples at this stage had such a decisive understanding. Again, what is meant by "Jews"? Does it mean the whole of Israel whether in Jerusalem or out of it? Is it meant to include the succeeding generations of Jews? This is, sadly, how the church has understood it and understood it wrongly. The reality is that only a limited number of Jews under the influence of the Jewish authorities were associated with the events that brought about Jesus' death. And even if they were associated with the death, surely the death of anyone unjustly punished is a commonplace of human history and cruelty.

Did the church not know of Jesus' prayer on the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?" Why is this saying from the Cross only found in Luke whether his gospel or in parallel statements in the book of Acts? Did Matthew or Mark not know of it or if they did, did they deliberately leave it out, yielding to some pressure group in the church? Certainly Peter in the Lucan Acts, assured the Jews that neither authorities nor those incited by them knew what they were doing (Acts 3.17). Yet this serious indictment that the "Jews" killed God, were guilty of deicide, was allowed by the church and opened the door to serious misrepresentation of the Jewish position. The church must confess its guilt.

But there is another question we must ask. Why do we make so much of the Gospels or the writings of Paul or the apostles? What, in fact, were the authorities for the teaching of the church? Here again we recall the Church's debt to Judaism. From the very first, the Hebrew scriptures were the arbiter of what was authoritative. From the very first, a phrase, "as it stands written", or similar words, were a preface to a quotation from scripture. All the NT writers were, of course, with the exception of Luke, Jews, and to them the Torah, the prophets and the writings were authoritative. Jesus, too, studied the scriptures, and found his own vocation there. What was the Christian method of interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures? It was not dissimilar to that of members of the Qumran community. The latter centred their interpretation on their leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, and used him as a key to unlock the meaning of the scripture. In much the same way, the church made Jesus the key to the understanding of what the Hebrew scriptures said. Matthew, for example, pinpoints major events in the life of Jesus with the formula, "in order that it might be fulfilled." Whatever it was, whether it related to his birth, the centre of his ministry in Capernaum, his healing ministry, his vocation as Suffering Servant, all of it was in fulfilment of the divine purpose. Thus what was used to interpret scripture was the christological key. Here the church's dependence on the Hebrew scriptures is patent.

We can accept, then, the authority of the Hebrew scriptures from the very beginnings of the church. But what about the church's writings? Though Jesus gave us nothing in writing, from the beginning his sayings were authoritative for the church. The gospel writers emphasize that Jesus taught with authoritative power. There is a magisterial authority, for example, about the phrase, "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, BUT I say unto you." Even when there is a story about Jesus, it is often clinched and driven home by a saying of Jesus. Indeed, the only reason for the story could be to highlight a saying of Jesus. By the middle of the second century the gospels were being read in the services of worship alongside the Hebrew scriptures. The letters of Paul, or

the so-called "Pauline Corpus", were collected by the end of the second century and were read also in the services of worship. Anything that derived from apostolic sources became authoritative but a writing could also merely have inherent or intrinsic authority such as, for example, the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was only at the end of the fourth century that, at least in the Western church, our present twenty-seven books of the NT were accepted as the rule of faith for the church. In the second century, a Christian, Marcion, attempted to reject the Hebrew scriptures but such a view was rejected as heretical. A part of the church did not accept all twenty-seven books and indeed the Eastern church was content for a time with twenty-two.

These writings, the Hebrew scriptures and the NT, came to be recognized as having supreme authority for the church, even to the point of verbal inspiration for some. This meant that everything in the written deposit took on an absolute authority as given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Again, we are confronted with the influence of Judaism on the church. The NT acquires the same authority as was given to the earlier thirty-nine books.

In 312 AD an event took place which was of great significance for the church, Constantine who had just defeated his rival, Maxentius, at the Milvian Bridge, became ruler of the Roman Empire. At this battle Constantine adopted as his standard the Greek letters Chi and Rho, representing the first two letters of the name "Christ". In 313 he promulgated the edict of Milan whereby Christianity attained the status of toleration. It now became the religion most favourably regarded by the State. Previously Jews who became Christian had been punished by fellow-Jews. This was forbidden. Christians no longer had to offer pagan sacrifices. The clergy were exempt from some taxes. Sunday became compulsorily a day of rest. In the Canons of Elvira enacted in 339 by Constantius III (337-361) Jews were to be separated from Christians. Intermarriage between Jews and Christians was not allowed. Jews were forbidden to have slaves whether Christian or pagan. But it was especially at the accession of Theodosius II in 383 and continuing until the

death of his son, Arcadius, in 408 that the Jews came under attack. The patriarchate of the Jews of the land of Israel, the ethnarch and his administration, were done away with. Edicts were passed that reduced the Jews to second-class citizens. Between the years 404 to 438 Jews could no longer hold office in the civil service or become representatives of cities, serve in the army or at the bar.

But it was not only the State that attacked the Jews. The hostility came from the church. Dr James Parkes, /29 in his book on "Antisemitism", sets out for us what some of the Fathers of the fourth century said about Judaism. Some of their statements are quite outrageous and patently false. We can set out some examples. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, in western France, comments on Psalm 52 where the tyrant boasts of his wickedness and the Psalmist asks: "Why do you boast, O mighty man, of mischief done against the ungodly? All the day long you are plotting destruction." (v1) Hilary applied it to the Jewish people who, he declared "had always persisted in iniquity and out of its abundance of evil, gloried in wickedness." John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, in 387 found that the Christians were being too friendly with their Jewish neighbours, launched a vicious and unbalanced onslaught on the Jews. He told the Christians that their Jewish neighbours "sacrifice their sons and daughters to devils; outrage nature; overthrow from their foundations the laws of relationship; are become worse than wild beasts; and, for no reason at all, murder their own offspring to worship the avenging devils who are attempting to destroy Christianity." Later, Chrysostom had to qualify these extreme statements which were clearly untrue. It is incredible to think that such outbursts were often based on scripture.

But, tragically, the support of the Fathers and the Church has run its course over centuries of distortion and persecution. Martin Gilbert sets out, in graphic form, the incredible history of anti-semitism of which we can only give fragments. Up until 300 AD, Jews lived in every part of the Roman Empire; they had freedom to practise their religion and to practise Jewish law in disputes among the Jews (14,15). The radical change in the position of the Jews under Christian rule has already been given above: /30

The latter sets the scene for centuries to come. In 1320 the notorious yellow badge was forced upon Jews in Cyprus. (p25); at Rhodes in 1502, Jews were forcibly converted, expelled or driven into slavery; ghettos were established in Constantinople, in Rhodes, and in Greece at Patras and Modon in areas of large population; in France, from 800-1500, the situation is varied: from 1200 to 1500, the area around Marseilles saw flourishing Jewish literary and scientific activity; in an area stretching from Troyes to Rouen, expulsions of Jews took place with the final expulsion taking place in 1394; places of anti-Jewish violence include Bray(1191), Rameru(1171), Blois (1191) and Chinon (1321) (p26); while Jews in Germany seemed to live in peace until 1000 AD, in the period 1000-1500, in no less than twenty-six towns, Jews were persecuted, and fled, some to Poland (1096, 1100-1400) or to the Ottoman empire (1348, 1360). The list is endless but note especially that in Budapest in 1279, the Church Council decreed that all Jews must wear a ring of red cloth on the left hand side of their outer garments.(p29). The flight of the Jews from Germany to Poland continued throughout the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. Even in Poland, the charge of deicide with all the accretions arising from superstitious and illiterate people was bound to take effect and the first outbreak in 1399 was frightening. In the town of Posen, a Rabbi and thirteen elders were accused of theft and desecration of church property. They were first tortured, and then burnt alive. These are only examples of what happened, it would seem, in all other European nations [cf Italy (37), England (38), Spain and Portugal (41) and Russia (41)]

But the fourth century set the scene for the anti-semitism of Martin Luther also. In a pamphlet, entitled "Martin Luther and the Jews /31, there is included a Tract of Luther, "On the Jews and their Lies". Astonishing, wild things are written. Luther is prepared to accept unverified slanders against the Jews that they are guilty of ritual murder, that they poison wells, that they drink human blood (He does recognize that the Jews do deny such.) But especially uninhibited are the following sentences: (16f)

What shall we do with this rejected, condemned Jewish people? We dare not be partakers of their lies, their cursing, their blasphemy. We cannot quench the fire of God's wrath, or convert them..... First, their synagogues and schools must be destroyed, burned or buried, as a sign that we Christians will not put up with open blasphemy against God and His Christ. Then, since the Jews teach the same blasphemies in their homes, we must destroy their houses and put them into barns and sheds like gypsies. Third, their prayer books and Talmuds where these blasphemies are written are to be taken away. Fourth, the Rabbis who teach such things must be banished.

The Lutheran World Federation in 1964 repudiated this kind of anti-Semitism. It declared:

"Anti-Semitism is primarily a denial of the image of God in the Jew; it represents a demonic form of rebellion against the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and a rejection of Jesus the Jew, directed upon his people. 'Christian' Anti-Semitism is spiritual suicide...in light of the long terrible history of Christian culpability for anti-Semitism ....as Lutherans, we confess our peculiar guilt, and we lament with shame the responsibility which our Church and her people bear for this sin." /32

Similarly, the Second Vatican Council rejected the anti-semitic statements of the Fathers. It states:

"Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it then that in catechetical work or in preaching of the Word of God that they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel or the spirit of Christ."

The Holocaust was an appalling and perhaps inevitable climax to the history of a Church given over to persecution of the Jewish people. It has thoroughly shaken the Church out of its complacency. Today the present task for both Jew and Christian is to seek to understand one another, and to value each other's traditions and cultures.

There is, however, one thing that perhaps should be stressed. We must, in all honesty, take account of areas of difference. We cannot ignore them or diminish them. Goodwill does not entail the watering down of either Judaism or Christianity. As Rabbi Raymond Apple expressed it /33 "Though coming from a common origin, each of the two religions has distinctive concepts which have no place in the

thinking of the other, and indeed, as Travers Herford stated categorically, 'Judaism and Christianity can never blend without the surrender by the one or the other of its fundamental principles.'

#### Notes

1. The lecture was delivered on the 22nd February in Dublin, and has been published by permission,
2. The paper has been expanded from that originally delivered especially in the later stages.
3. Roth, Cecil, The Jewish Contribution to Civilisation, Oxford, 1943, 2,3
4. C.G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels, 2 vols., (London, 1927); also Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching (London, 1930)
5. Klausner, J., Jesus of Nazareth (trans from Hebrew), (NYork and London, 1925)
6. Vermes, G, Jesus the Jew, (London 1973); also Scripture and Tradition in Judaism, (Leiden 1961); David Flusser, Jesus, trans. Ronald Walls, (NYork, 1969); Sandmel, Samuel, The first Christian Century in Judaism and Christianity (Oxford 1969); also A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament, (London 1977)
7. The latin form is Iesus
8. The Gospel of Luke, (London, 1930 Moffatt), 20f
9. The origin of the synagogue still remains obscure however. cf TDNT, Vol VII, 810
10. Flusser, op.cit., claims that healing on the Sabbath was always permitted, even when the illness was not serious; in any case Jesus performs the healing with words, as was permitted.(49,50); cf also Maccoby, Hyam M., Judaism in the First Century, (London 1989), 45.
11. The implication here is of cursing as the contrary condition; cf Deut.11.26: "Behold, I set before you

- this day a blessing and a curse." Cf Lk 6.20-26; Mt 23
- 12 Although there are two forms of the prayer, that in Matthew and that in Luke(11.1-4), church tradition chose the former and developed it in liturgical fashion as the textual evidence indicates.
  13. So W.D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, Jr, The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol I [ T&T Clark, Edinburgh, ICC 1988), 599f
  - 14 op.cit. 100
  15. Cf Davies, Allison,op.cit. 595
  16. G.F. Moore, Judaism, Vol I, 500
  17. Maccoby, op.cit. 119f
  18. ibid.
  19. Maccoby,op.cit.12:"The Pharisees were...a three-tiered movement consisting of sages, rank-and-file Pharisees, and 'people of the land.'"
  20. Martin Gilbert, Jewish History Atlas,(Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London 1969), 18
  21. But cf E.P. Sanders, Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, Vol I for the essay by Gerd Lüdemann, "The Successors of Pre-70 Jerusalem Christianity: A Critical Evaluation of the Pella Tradition," (SCM, London 1980), 161-173 where he calls into question the historicity of the Pella tradition.
  22. The translation is that of G.D. Kilpatrick,The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew, (Oxford 1946), 109.
  23. op.cit. 113
  24. It is especially the Gospels of St. John and St Matthew that have given rise to anti-semitism.
  25. For the most recent discussion on the meaning of the verb ἰσχυροῦσθε see Ernst Käsemann, An die Römer, HNT, [J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)Tübingen 1974; also C.B. Cranfield, Romans, Vol 1 (ICC, T&T Clark 1975) ad loc.

26. Hans Conzelmann, (Acts of the Apostles, ET, Hermeneia series, Fortress Press, 1987), on ch.2.36 denies that there is an adoptionist ring here. Rather the formulation is Lucan. "Luke derives the combination of the two titles from the scriptural proof, the results of which he summarizes here; he obtains the Messiah title (v31) from Psalm 16 and the kurios title from Psalm 110."
27. For an important discussion on kurios, see Werner Kramer, Christ, Lord, Son of God, in Studies in Biblical Theology (SCM, London ET 1966), 15a-19a
28. Cf Friedrich BÜchsel on John 8.58 (TDNT, Vol II, 399)
29. James Parkes, Antisemitism, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1963), 64
30. Martin Gilbert, op.cit.19 points out that under Muslim rule Jews found greater toleration than under Christianity
31. E. Gordon Rupp, Martin Luther and the Jews, Robert Whalley Cohn Memorial Lecture (The Council of Christians and Jews, 1972), 16,17
32. Stepping Stone to Further Jewish-Christian Relations (An unabridged collection of Christian Documents); Compiled by Helga Croner, (Stimulus Books, London, New York, 1977), 86
33. E. Gordon Rupp, Martin Luther and the Jews, (The Council of Christians and Jews, London 1972), 16f