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The Crucifixion



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Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

The Crucifixion



General Editor: KIREET JOSHI

Uday - Gopi



Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

Preface .

The task of preparing teaching-learning material for value oriented education is enormous.

There is, first, the idea that value-oriented education should be exploratory rather than prescriptive, and that the teaching-learning material should provide to the learners a growing experience of exploration.

Secondly, it is rightly contended that the proper inspiration to turn to value-orientation is provided by biographies, autobiographical accounts, personal anecdotes, epistles, short poems, stories of humour, stories of human interest, brief passages filled with pregnant meanings, reflective short essays written in well-chiselled language, plays, powerful accounts of historical events, statements of personal experiences of values in actual situations of life, and similar other statements of scientific, philosophical, artistic and literary expression.

Thirdly, we may take into account the contemporary fact that the entire world is moving rapidly towards the synthesis of the East and the West, and in that context, it seems obvious that our teaching-learning material should foster the gradual familiarisation of students with global themes of universal significance as also those that underline the importance of diversity in unity. This implies that the material should bring the students nearer to their cultural heritage, but also to the highest that is available in the cultural experiences of the world at large.

Fourthly, an attempt should be made to select from Indian

and world history such examples that could illustrate the theme of the upward progress of humankind. The selected research material could be multi-sided, and it should be presented in such a manner and in the context in which they need in specific situations that might obtain or that can be created in respect of the students.

The research team at the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) has attempted the creation of the relevant teaching-learning material, and they have decided to present the same in the form of monographs. The total number of these monographs will be around eighty.

It appears that there are three major powers that uplift life to higher and higher normative levels, and the value of these powers, if well illustrated, could be effectively conveyed to the learners for their upliftment. These powers are those of illumination, heroism and harmony.

It may be useful to explore the meanings of these terms — illumination, heroism and harmony — since the aim of these monographs is to provide material for a study of what is sought to be conveyed through these three terms. We offer here exploratory statements in regard to these three terms.

Illumination is that ignition of inner light in which meaning and value of substance and life-movement are seized, understood, comprehended, held, and possessed, stimulating and inspiring guided action and application and creativity culminating in joy, delight, even ecstasy. The width, depth and height of the light and vision determine the degrees of illumination, and when they reach the splendour and glory of synthesis and harmony, illumination ripens into wisdom. Wisdom, too, has varying degrees that can uncover powers of knowledge and action, which reveal unsuspected secrets and unimagined skills of art and craft of creativity and effectiveness.

Heroism is, essentially, inspired force and self-giving and sacrifice in the operations of will that is applied to the quest, realisation and triumph of meaning and value against the resistance of limitations and obstacles by means of courage, battle

and adventure. There are degrees and heights of heroism determined by the intensity, persistence and vastness of sacrifice. Heroism attains the highest states of greatness and refinement when it is guided by the highest wisdom and inspired by the sense of service to the ends of justice and harmony, as well as when tasks are executed with consummate skill.

Harmony is a progressive state and action of synthesis and equilibrium generated by the creative force of joy and beauty and delight that combines and unites knowledge and peace and stability with will and action and growth and development. Without harmony, there is no perfection, even though there could be maximisation of one or more elements of our nature. When illumination and heroism join and engender relations of mutuality and unity, each is perfected by the other and creativity is endless.

The purpose of this monograph, entitled "The Crucifixion", is to present the message of love Jesus taught during the three years of his ministry, as well as to present the dramatic events that culminated in his Crucifixion. This message powerfully opened to humanity Love as it had never been conceived of before. Certainly, we can read of God's love for his creation and humanity in the Old Testament such as in The Law of Moses and The Psalms. But as history tells us, the message of love Jesus brought to humanity was carried beyond its Jewish context and brought to all of humanity by Paul of The New Testament. Paul recognised that the non-Jewish world could not adhere to both the strict Law of Moses, as orthodox Jews had to in order to worship properly, as well as follow the path of the illuminated Love Jesus asked of us. He did away with the Law of an "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" by replacing it with the Golden Rule. To demand both would have made it impossible to spread Jesus's truth to all of humanity. Jesus asked us to love each other as God loves us. Here was a great step in the evolution of humanity towards human unity.

Editor's Note

All of the words of God and Jesus that are used in this essay are printed in italics. Furthermore, those sayings which have become famous and are used as proverbs are underlined. Certain words and expressions which deserve the reader's special attention, are explained either in the text or in the Notes. There are many versions in English of the Bible. The one chosen for this essay employs modern English rather than older versions which use archaic spellings and grammar.

The Bible is the only source of the events as well as words of both Jesus and Moses. Modern scholarship and archaeological research are making attempts to clarify as many points as possible. However, it is the Bible which has been the foundation of Judaic-Christian belief for over 3,000 years in the case of the Judaism, and for 2,000 years in the case of the Christianity. So, this essay gives some attention to the development of the New Testament. There is no mistaking the fact that the Bible has been considered to be the absolute truth, the Word of God, for much of its existence. And in consideration of this history, the present essay has been written as if this were the case. That is, regardless of the doubts and problems raised by modern scholarship and one's own personal faith, this essay treats the Bible as if it were the truth.

There are times when the beliefs and dogmas of Christianity need to be explained. Although the basic theology of all of Christianity is based on the Nicene Creed, each sect of Christianity interprets the Bible somewhat differently. The present essay does its best to avoid any interpretation and discusses only the actual passages, descriptions and sayings of Jesus and Moses found in the Bible. For this reason, although the term "Christ" is explained, Jesus himself is only referred to as "Jesus" throughout the essay. The focus of this essay is God's Love for humanity as it is found in both the Old and New Testaments, and particularly as it is brought forth by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, that is, the Crucifixion.

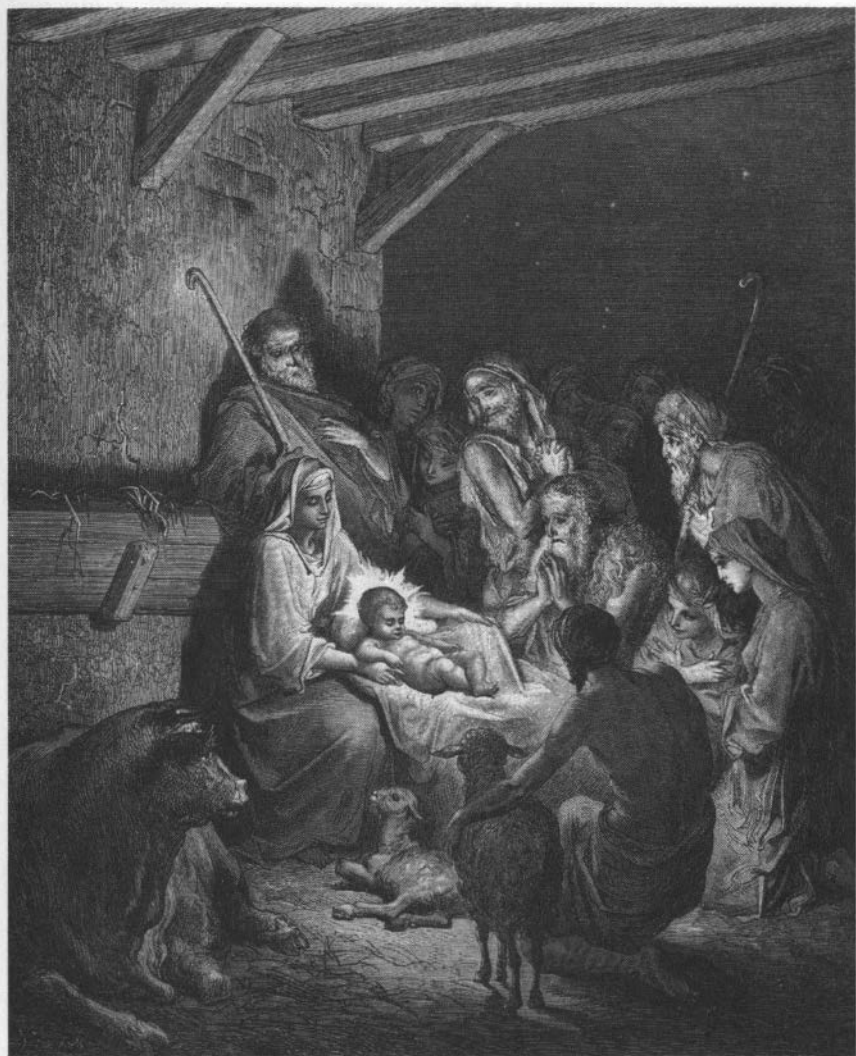
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THE NATIVITY, by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

The Crucifixion

Introduction

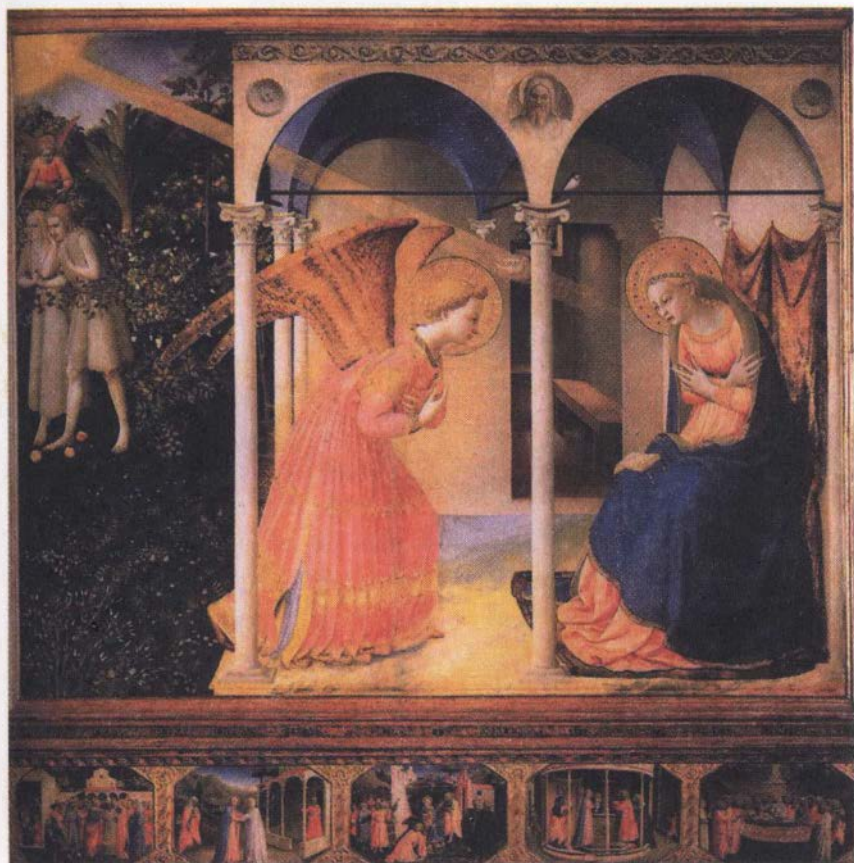
I. — The Life of Jesus

The Crucifixion of Jesus followed by his Resurrection three days later, is the foundation upon which Christianity exists. For this reason, the present essay focuses on the Crucifixion. But perhaps it would be useful to also have a short telling of the entire life of Jesus. All of the events of his life are to be found only in the New Testament. There is no other record.

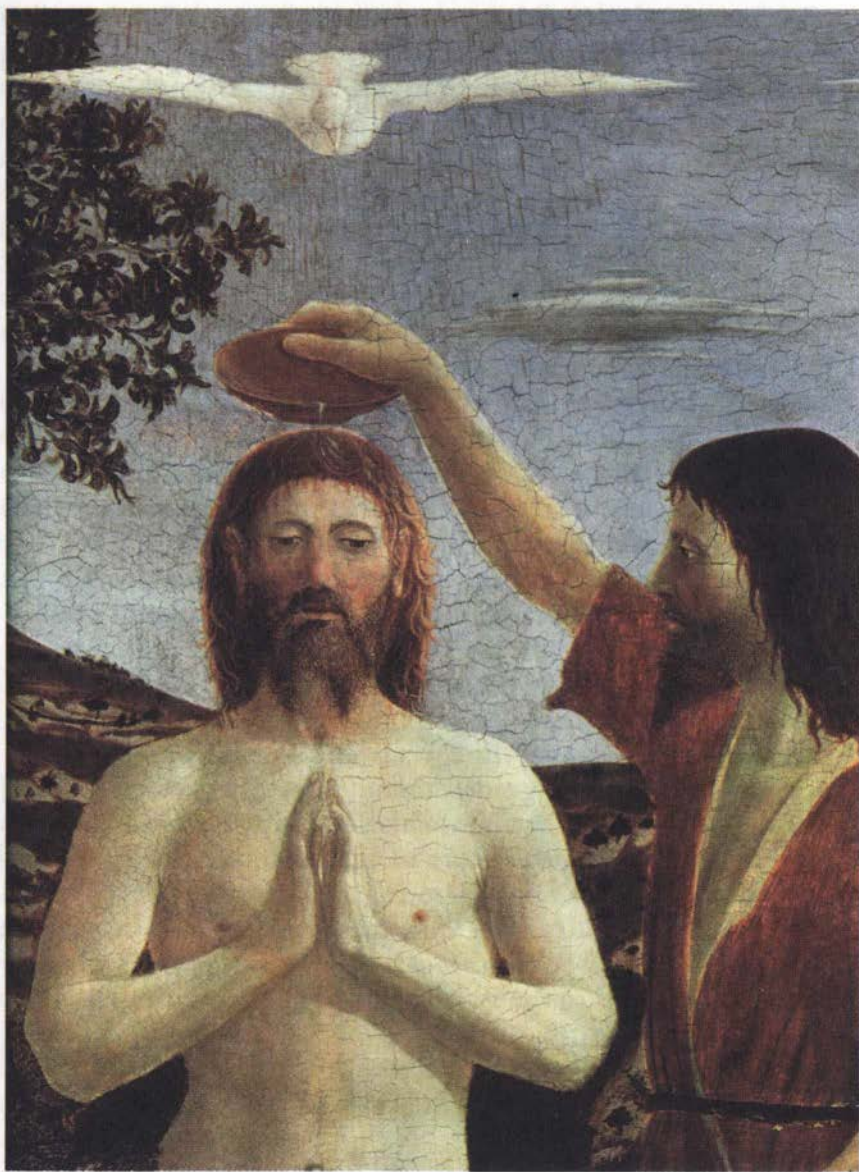
The Annunciation, Nativity and Youth

The birth of Jesus is the story of a miracle and that miracle is called Christmas. The telling of the Christmas story is found primarily in the Gospel of Luke. A young virgin named Mary is engaged to be married to a man known as Joseph. However, as she is sitting alone, suddenly the angel Gabriel appears to her and says "Hail Mary, full of grace*, the Lord is with you and blessed be the fruit of thy womb." At first frightened, she

* grace: the divine assistance and power given to man by God.



THE ANNUNCIATION, by Fra Angelico (ca. 1387-1455)



JESUS' BAPTISM, by Piero della Francesca (ca. 1420-1492)

asks how this is possible as she is a virgin. And Gabriel tells her of the miraculous conception* of the child who is to become Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind. And the miracle is that the Holy Spirit, another name for God, has fathered the child. That is to say, the Father of Jesus Christ is God. This scene of the Angel appearing before the startled Mary is called the Annunciation and has been a favourite subject of painters. Over Gabriel's head, one can see a dove descending in rays of golden light. This dove is God as the Holy Spirit. It is through God as the Holy Spirit that The Virgin Mary conceives Jesus in her womb. Since Mary remained a virgin despite her pregnancy, this event is known as the Immaculate** Conception.

Joseph is guided by God through dreams not to throw Mary away in disgrace, who is pregnant even though Joseph never slept with her. He being a man of great faith accepts Mary in her pregnant condition as his wife and protects her. In fact, after the birth of Jesus, he is told to run away to Egypt with her for a time because the king Herod attempted to murder all newborn boys in his kingdom because of a prediction by Three Wise men that the King of the Jews has been born. In Chapter II of Matthew, one can find the account of the Three Wisemen and how they find Jesus and Mary by following a miraculous star that guides them. They then worship the infant Jesus and present him with precious gifts. In a dream, they are told of the evil nature of Herod and that they are to leave Judea without seeing Herod again. This they do.

The birth of Jesus is the Christmas story that the world is most familiar with. For purposes of taking a census*** all citizens had to return to the city of the origin of their lineage. For

* Conception: the making of a new human being by the fertilizing of the egg(ovum) by a sperm, and implantation of the fertilized egg in the womb, where it will grow until birth.

** Immaculate: morally pure; free from sin or spiritual corruption.

***census: (in ancient Rome) a registration of the population and a property evaluation for purposes of taxation For this reason, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem.

Joseph, this city was Bethlehem as he was of the lineage of the great king, David. As Mary and Joseph arrived in the city, her time came, but there was no room in any inn, so she had to give birth in a manger* of a barn. The description of this event in Chapter II of Luke forms the well-known scene of shepherds and farm animals surrounding the new born Saviour-to-be, Jesus, that one sees everywhere in the Christian world. The Star and the Three Wise men described in Matthew are often also incorporated into scenes of the Nativity as this scene is called in paintings.

The Gospels offer very little about the growing-up of Jesus, or his life as a young man. One exception is found at the end of Chapter II of Luke, and tells of the visit of the 12-year-old Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem where he had precocious discussions with the scholars there. We also are told that Joseph was a carpenter, and we might presume that he learned that craft, although nothing is said about that possibility in the Bible.

The Meeting with John the Baptist

John the Baptist, as he is best known, was the cousin of Jesus. His birth was six months before that of Jesus and was also miraculous, but in a different manner. His mother, Elizabeth, was very old and beyond child-bearing age when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her aged husband Zachariah and announced that they would be the parents of a blessed child who would open the way for the future Saviour. It is written that when Mary visited Elizabeth when both women were pregnant, John leaped for joy inside his mother's womb. When he was 30 years old, John began a ministry of baptism, calling all to come to him as he stood in a river and have him wash away their sins. He spoke of getting ready for the Kingdom of Heaven by cleaning oneself of sin. And he also spoke of the

* manger: a box in a stable, barn, etc., from which horses or cattle feed.

coming of the man who would be the Messiah, the true Saviour. And Jesus did come to John in a river and asked to be baptised. John said that one as pure as Jesus had no need of baptism, but Jesus insisted that it was proper for all humans to receive Baptism, and so John baptised him. And when Jesus came up out of the water heaven opened and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and settled on Jesus. Then a voice came out of heaven, saying,

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

And the baptism begins the ministry* of Jesus. He soon encounters certain men who intuitively are aware of his true nature and when he calls them to follow him, they immediately obey and these men become the disciples** of Jesus. By the time of the Crucifixion, there will be twelve of them. Very soon afterwards, he attends a wedding in the city of Cana. And there he has the occasion to perform his first miracle. The wine, so important for a wedding feast, runs out. Jesus asks that the many water jugs be filled with water. This water becomes wine and the feast may then continue.

Forty Days in the Desert and the Encounter with Satan

After the wedding, Jesus decides to fast*** for forty days in the desert. At the end of the forty days, Satan appears to Jesus to tempt him. If Satan were to succeed, Jesus' mission would fail. Knowing his hunger after a 40-day fast, Satan points to some stones and suggests that Jesus quickly turn them into

* ministry: various acts and deeds to promote one's religion, such as teaching.

** disciple: a personal follower of Jesus (including his 12 Apostles) during his earthly life.

*** fast: to not eat all or certain foods or meals, esp. as a religious observance.

bread and to break his fast. The answer of Jesus is famous:

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God."

Then Satan carried Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem and advised him to jump, reassuring Jesus that God would catch him and prevent him from being hurt. To which Jesus replied,

"You shall not tempt your Lord, your God."

Finally, Satan takes Jesus to a place where he can see all the nations, and tempts Jesus once more. Satan promises that Jesus would become the ruler of all the nations if Jesus would bow to Satan and worship him. To this Jesus replies,

"Get away from me Satan. It is written in the Scriptures
'You will worship the Lord, your God, and only serve Him'".*

Satan had to do as Jesus commanded and left him.

Parables, Teachings and Miracles

And from this time, Jesus began his ministry in earnest. Along with his disciples, he preached and baptized always with the same message: to prepare for the Kingdom of God and to have eternal life in Heaven with God the Father. There are many examples of his teaching and of his way of teaching. Some of these are presented in this essay. For example, he used parables, short stories that emphasized his point at the moment. Or he questioned someone and by the answer made his point, which was always to prepare for the Kingdom of God. The most famous of his teachings is the Sermon on the Mount, which is discussed in this essay. During his ministry,

* Scriptures: specific writings regarded as sacred by a religious group, e.g. Holy Bible.

there were the miracles: bringing the dead back to life, the healing of incurably diseased persons, feeding many people who had come to hear him with only a few fish and loaves of bread, and even walking on water during a storm.

During his ministry, his attention primarily turned toward sinners. He and his disciples were eating together with tax collectors and others who were thought to be sinners by religious people of Israel. And so these religious people demanded of Jesus why he kept such poor company and he typically answered:

"Those who are well don't need a physician, but those who are sick. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

And here is the key word of Jesus' message: repentance.* He asked that all be consciously aware of the acts and thoughts they have, and when one finds sin within him/herself, to stop these evil acts and thoughts and to lead a life pleasing to God. After becoming aware of your sins, you have to repent for having sinned. If true repentance took place, the Kingdom of God awaited you. If there was no repentance, you would be cast into the pit of Hell for eternity.

The Enemies of Jesus

Jesus made enemies. According to the Gospels, it was these enemies who made sure that he was eliminated by crucifixion. These enemies were the religious officials and teachers of the Jewish establishment at that time. In the Gospels they are called Scribes and Pharisees. At this point, the reader should be reminded that Judea and its capital, Jerusalem were occupied by Rome. The Hebrew people were not free to govern

* repentance: the feeling of great sorrow for one's past actions or sins.

their own country. It was a policy of the Romans to allow some freedom such as religious worship and maintaining local customs. What did Jesus do to make them his enemies? First of all, he broke the Sabbath laws. The Sabbath which modern Jews, Christians and Moslems still follow has the same foundation as that of the Hebrews from the time of Moses. Keeping the Sabbath is the fourth of the Ten Commandments. After the Creation, which lasted six days, God said that He would rest and that the seventh day of the week was to always be a day of rest.

12 Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 14 But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work ? you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

(Deut 5: 12-15)

As the Jewish religion developed, what was meant by 'rest' had to be defined. So many rules and regulations were created over the years as to what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. And these rules exist even today among religious Jewish, Moslem and Christian people. However, Jesus said that mercy and compassion were more important than rules and regulations. Once when he cured a man's withered hand in the synagogue* on the Sabbath, the Pharisees were furious and began to plot to kill him. But Jesus insisted "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*"

* synagogue: the place of worship and gathering of a Jewish congregation.

Forgiving Sin by the Son of Man

But perhaps the most provoking acts and words of Jesus were those by which he acted as if he possessed the authority of God. That is to say, he virtually declared himself to be God. In the Gospels, Jesus forgives sins. How can a man forgive sin? Only God can forgive sins. There are several such incidents in the Gospels. When the Pharisees witnessed the curing of a paralyzed man after Jesus said to him

"Your sins are forgiven."

they angrily exclaimed, "Who is this that speaks blasphemies*? Who can forgive sins but God alone! And then Jesus said,

"I said it in order that you may know that the Son of man has authority upon earth to forgive sins."

As the punishment for a blasphemer was to be put to death, the officials of the temple plotted his death. After the Last Supper, Jesus was betrayed by a traitorous disciple called Judas Iscariot. This is a famous scene which takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas led a group of Roman soldiers. He went to Jesus and kissed him. This display of perverse love was the signal to the soldiers that here was Jesus. And so he was arrested and led to the High Priest of the temple where he was found guilty of blasphemy*. He was then led to the head of the Roman occupation, Pontius Pilate, who found it difficult to condemn Jesus to death, so Pilate, in another famous scene, washed his hands of the responsibility of sentencing Jesus to death. It was the custom that at the time of the Passover, one man could be freed and thus saved from crucifixion (see Note). Pilate then asked the crowd of Jews who do they wish to be saved, and the crowd condemned Jesus to death by

* blasphemy: an act or words which insult God or a holy place.

shouting the name of a criminal, Barabbas to be freed. Since the execution of a non-Roman meant crucifixion, this was his sentence. First, however, Jesus was scourged or whipped and then was made to carry the horizontal part of the cross along the Via Dolorosa as the traditional path he trod to the site of the Crucifixion is called.

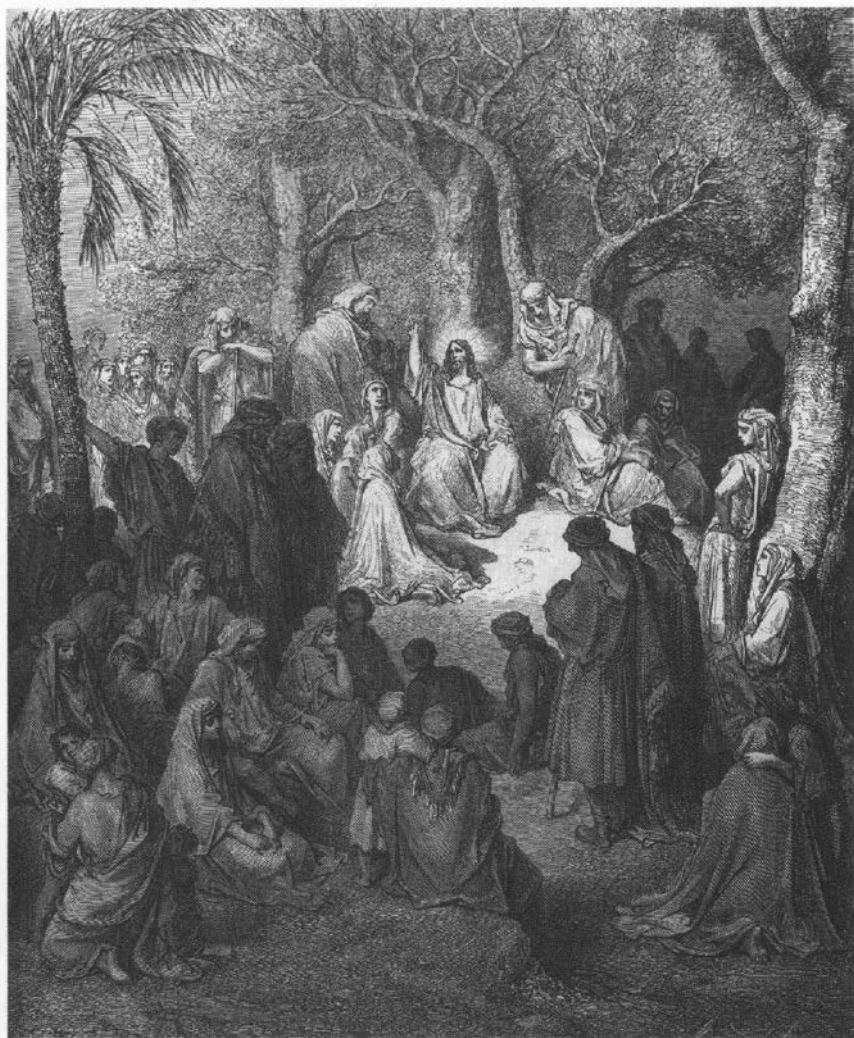
That Jesus is God and died on the Cross to allow sinners to be saved is one of the most basic dogmas of the Christian religion. And thus Jesus becomes Jesus Christ. This is officially stated in the Nicene Creed, which is presented in this essay. By allowing Himself (God/Jesus) to be sacrificed on the Cross, He showed His love for humanity, because humans were doomed to sin by their nature and therefore, to be damned to Hell. By the sacrifice of God Himself, who was also Jesus the human, on the Cross, the sins of humanity could be forgiven. There were three conditions: First, all humans must be baptized which will wash away the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. Secondly, every human must lead as sinless a life as possible, repenting whenever there is a falling back to sin. And finally, each human must have complete faith in the miracle of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, whereby God/Jesus redeemed humanity from The Fall of Adam and allowed humanity the opportunity to be saved so that a soul could be with God in Heaven for eternity having been forgiven the sins that each would commit during a lifetime. After His Resurrection, Jesus says

[Mark 16:15] And he said to them, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.*"

[Mark 16:16] *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*"

*

* *



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, by Gustave Doré

The Crucifixion

Introduction

II. — *Jesus and the Theme of Love*

In his famous speech at St. Helena, Napoleon exclaimed:

"I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ, and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and any other religion the distance of infinity . . . Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires. But upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him"

(Monser, 503, 508). Kennedy, James and Newcomb, Jerry (1994), *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson).

The basic reason accepted by the Early Christians for the crucifixion was that God loved man so much, that he sent his only son, Jesus, as a sacrifice that would atone* for the sins committed by mankind. Thus, the one idea central to Jesus'

* atone: the reunion of man and God by the life, and the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus.

mission is love. This was most clearly expressed when Paul, one of his greatest disciples, (see Note) said:

13 1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful;

5 it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

6 it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.

7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

9 For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect;

10 but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

13 So faith, hope, love abide,* these three; but the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

The word Love has so many meanings and shades of meanings that when translating the Bible from Greek into English, the translators came upon the word *agape*, which has been

* abide: to always dwell in a place or in one's heart/mind.

translated as "God's Love". With this in mind, the English word "charity" has sometimes been chosen to translate the Greek *agape*. This was meant to reinforce the idea of *agape* being a selfless, giving love. Of course, God's Love is unselfish. It is generous, kind, peaceable, trusting, temperate, patient and humble. God's Love is everything good. It consists of pure things that are lacking in the imperfection of mankind. So this is the Love meant by Paul in the above quote. This is the Love that Jesus brought to us to generate in our hearts.

1. The Life of Jesus and the Gospels

We do not know much about the life of Jesus. It is only through the four Gospels of the New Testament (see Note) that we know some of the details of his ministry and teachings. The Gospels tell us that he was a public figure. We know that he gathered a devoted following, He preached to multitudes and the Gospels record his important sayings, which are his public ministry. His ministry lasted for three years, and seems to have focused especially around teaching and the working of miracles such as the casting out of demons and healing people. He finally went to Jerusalem at the time of Passover, (see Note) an important festival in the Jewish holy calendar where he was soon arrested and executed. In fact, in contrast to the rest of his life, the Gospels give most detail about his trial and execution.

2. The Gospels

Since the four canonical* Gospels are the only source of Jesus' words and actions, it is important that the reader has

* canon(ical): the officially accepted holy writings or scriptures: the canonical Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

some idea of how they came to be written. For the past 2000 years each Gospel was believed to have been written by eyewitnesses, so-called Evangelists, but modern scholarship has found varying evidence that makes it unclear as to who the Evangelists actually were. Accordingly, there is the question of when each Gospel was written. In this essay, the focus will be on the Gospels as they were accepted by Christians through the 2000 years of the history of Western Civilization, and it is possible to make a reasonable guess as to how the Gospels were written

How the Gospels Were Probably Written

First, there was the public ministry of Jesus, which is usually dated to approximately 30-33 CE.* Jesus himself did not leave anything in writing, and nothing was written about Jesus in the course of his public ministry, except, perhaps, the sign at the top of the cross that Pilate ordered, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". The evidence of the Gospels suggests that Jesus did not instruct his twelve followers, the Apostles to write anything about him. Rather, he commanded them to preach and to teach.

The second stage in the formation of the Gospels is the preaching and teaching of the apostles. In fact, the meaning of the word 'gospel' is "good news". This period can be dated approximately to 70 CE. After the first Easter, the date in the Christian holy calendar of Jesus' Resurrection, the apostles and eyewitnesses proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus as the revelation of God's love for the world. They began the proclamation of the revelation where the four written Gospels end, which is with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The apostles soon went on to speak about the life of Jesus, his words and his deeds, perhaps in response to such questions as,

* CE: Common Era: used by non-Christians or secular persons instead of the Christian AD (in the year of our Lord).

'Why was Jesus crucified?' A good example of such preaching is to be found in Peter's words to the pagan Cornelius.

34 And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37 the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; 41 not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

(Acts 10:36-43)

These first preachers understood the significance of Jesus' identity and mission in a way that was not possible during his public ministry. That is to say, they preached and taught in the light of their faith in the crucifixion and resurrection.

The language spoken by Jesus and the Hebrew people (see Note) around him was Aramaic. The first preachers were from Judea and spoke Aramaic. But soon the tradition about Jesus had to be translated from Aramaic into Greek as the preaching of the Gospel spread beyond the area in and around Jerusalem. These first preachers and teachers were not interested in conveying information about Jesus for its own sake. They sought

to arouse faith in others, faith in Jesus as the Christ, (see Note) as Lord and Saviour. They selected from the tradition of Jesus' words and deeds that which would be most helpful in preaching the gospel to unbelievers, in teaching the gospel to those who had come to believe, and in disputing with Jewish opponents. In time, they may have gathered together the teaching of Jesus according to his parables (see below) on the kingdom; and the miraculous deeds of Jesus such as healing stories.

It must be imagined that the handling of the tradition surrounding Jesus in the early Church involved revisions of that material, in order to apply it to the actual problems of the developing church, the most important problem being the increasing number of gentiles* entering the Church. However, the forty years of this second period was predominantly a time of oral tradition. While the tradition concerning Jesus' public ministry, death and resurrection circulated orally as preaching and teaching, in the course of this period, some of that tradition began to be written down. There may well have been an early version of the Passion (see Note) narrative in this second stage. In other words, some of the tradition concerning Jesus had already begun to be put into writing before the first Gospel was written.

This brings us to the third and final stage, which is the writing of the canonical Gospels said to be by the Four Evangelists, Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, and covers the period from 70 to 100 CE. The writers of the Gospels inherited the tradition about Jesus that came from the original eyewitnesses largely as an oral tradition. However, the authors, who were responsible for the actual writing of the Gospels, were not themselves eyewitnesses. They were the next generation to the eyewitnesses, and this is true of the four Evangelists. This is clearly recognized by Luke at the very beginning of his Gospel:

* gentile: non-Jewish person (see also heathen)

"Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the first, to write an orderly account for you..."

(Luke 1:1-3)

Luke acknowledges that the Gospel he is about to write is based on the tradition that was handed on by the original eyewitnesses who subsequently became 'servants of the word', i.e. preachers and teachers. Accordingly, we must distinguish the 'apostles' who knew Jesus from the sacred authors/writers of the Gospels, whose work was to introduce and bring forth the faith.

3. The Three Synoptic Gospels

The first three Gospels to be written were those of Mark, Matthew and Luke. These three Gospels belong together and are called 'synoptic' because of the many correspondences between them. The large number of the similarities between Mark, Matthew and Luke can only be explained on the basis of some kind of literary source that they all used. It appears that Mark's gospel was written first and is the primary written source for Matthew and Luke. The dates for the writing of the Synoptic Gospels are said to be between 70-90 CE.

The Fourth Gospel

The Fourth Gospel, John's Gospel, seems to have been composed independently of the other three. In it, what had been claimed for the Torah, where the Law is to be found, is now being transferred to the Son of God. That is, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus recognizes in himself and is recognized as the

Christ. Therefore, while Jesus urges his disciples to keep the Law, it could be said that Jesus sees the Law alone as being unable to regulate human action. John sees Jesus as fulfilling the Law, as its completion. Jesus goes beyond the letter of Law. The dialogue between Jesus and the Jews in John 7 illustrates this point very well. Jesus has been branded a sinner for healing on the Sabbath and so some Pharisees (see Note) wish to kill him. But Jesus points out that in trying to kill him, they break the Law themselves. In this encounter, Jesus identifies his work with the work of Moses (see Appendix), but on a higher level of consciousness:

"If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the Sabbath?"

(John 7:23)

John can thus state:

"The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ".

(John 1:17)

Increased consciousness followed by action inspired by Love is truer to God's intentions for humanity than simply following the words of the Law. John is clearly making the statement that in the words of Jesus a new law, a life-giving law based on Love now applies. The revelation of God is now no longer only in Moses. Moses, himself, who according to the Gospels is supplanted by Jesus, prophesized the coming of a great prophet.

15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. 17 The LORD said to me: *"What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will*

tell them everything I command him."

(Deut. 18:15, 17,18)

All Gospels have a Passion narrative because one of the central Christian rituals, the Eucharist, (see Note) is presented in the telling of the story of the Passion.

What do the Gospels reveal about Jesus and his mission

There are several essential aspects of Jesus in the Gospels: Jesus as the miracle worker, Jesus as the preacher who made a deep impression upon those who he came in contact with, his ability to attract large crowds, his ability to attract a dedicated core group of followers or disciples, as well as a much larger group of people who saw him as someone special. This man clearly was peculiar, this man clearly made a mark, left an impression, someone you did not forget. Somebody who had power in a social sense. Someone who actually was able to somehow attract, enchant, and hold a large group of followers within the three years of his ministry.

So what pattern do we see? He is a holy man, a miracle man, someone who gets in trouble with the authorities, whoever they may be. Pharisees, scribes, priests, elders, he is constantly in trouble with them as a free-spirited individual. Someone who preached in the synagogue. All of these activities are the function of his power, the power that he has as a miracle worker and a holy man. This is what gets him into trouble with the authorities. This is finally what leads him to be crucified. At some point, such an individual with strong views on God simply could no longer be tolerated by the powers that be. These authorities had to protect the beliefs of their religion, the Jewish religion, so deeply believed by them, as well as being responsible not to anger the Roman rulers of Jerusalem.

The Influence of the Gospels

That the Gospels reinforce Jesus' preaching is undoubtedly true, but how they developed directly from that preaching is much more difficult to know. In any event, the assertion that the Gospels were more preaching than biography is probably a valid point, considering the ever increasing number of gentiles who were to be converted, but who had no Judaic background to understand monotheism and the Law's insistence on obedience to God.

Rather than being actual history, the Gospels' purpose was quite similar to that of preaching or religious instruction: the bringing of Jesus' message to converts, the confirmation of believers in their faith, and the nurturing of the faith of members of the newly formed churches. But, on the other hand, one cannot forget that the Gospels have been accepted as absolute truth by Christians for 2000 years, and their influence in history and culture must be based on that fact.

Historically, Christian missionaries took Christianity and the message of the Gospels to the barbaric tribes of Europe. With the spread of Christianity throughout barbaric Europe, came the forms of Roman law and Greek culture that eventually civilized these tribes. Christianity, along with its own message, was the primary source and carrier of classical civilization to the Western World. But the result of such missionary activity was not a rebirth of classical paganism but a new birth of something quite different. Through teachings such as the Sermon on the Mount (see below), Christian Europe developed a morality based on Jewish ideas, which had been absent from pagan cultures. Christian morality is in the main Jewish morality. But, without the Church, no means to spread this new moral order would have existed, proving the wisdom of Paul in bringing the message of Jesus to the gentile world... to the whole world.

It has been said that the West is an offspring of the Church and that the Church and the West are inextricably bound

together. It has been said that the history of the West is the history of the Church and the culture of the West is the Church's culture. Whatever be the merit of these views, it is true that Western culture is permeated by the Love Jesus preached and taught as the key to God's Kingdom. The whole world has not been made Christian as Jesus commanded of his disciples, but certainly his Love has played an enormous role in shaping the world as we know it today.

Western law to the extent that it is tempered with mercy and seeks social justice reflects its moral roots in the New Testament. The dynamic in the West leading to ever expanding freedom for individuals and groups is based on the idea that all are equal before God. Although taken out of the context of Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's famous speech on Justice tempered by mercy exemplifies this ideal.

PORTIA

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

*

* *

4. How Jesus Taught

According to the writers of the New Testament, the most typical form of the teachings of Jesus was the parable:

"He said nothing to them without a parable" (Matt. 13:34)

Like the rabbis* of his time, Jesus used familiar events to illustrate a religious or ethical situation called parables to help people understand who God is and what his kingdom is like. Jesus used images and characters taken from everyday life to create a miniature play or drama to illustrate his message. In fact, this was Jesus' most common way of teaching. Over a third of the Gospels by Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain parables told by Jesus. Jesus used these illustrations to reach the heart of his listeners by stimulating their imagination, and to point to another order of reality — hidden, yet visible to those who had "eyes to see" and "ears to hear". These vivid illustrations captured the imaginations of his audience more powerfully than an abstract explanation could.

He used easily understandable images and stories, such as hidden treasure, a determined woman looking for her lost coin, the pearl of great price, the uninvited wedding guests, to help the listener to grasp timeless and extraordinary truths. The parables commonly featured examples or illustrations from daily life in ancient Palestine, such as mustard seeds and fig trees, wineskins and oil lamps, money and treasure, stewards, workers, judges, and homemakers, and children's games. Jesus' audience would be very familiar with these illustrations from their everyday life.

Jesus sometimes taught by use of comparisons: Here is one well-known example.

30 And he said, "*With what can we compare the kingdom of*

* rabbi: a Jew trained for professional religious leadership of a Jewish congregation.

God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

(Mark 4:30-31)

Most commonly, a parable was told to bring out a moral lesson or important truths about God and his kingdom. There were lessons pertaining to the way life should be lived and the happiness which God has for us. First, there is the literal meaning, apparent to all as we all have experience with the simple subject matter. Of course, beyond the literal meaning lies a deeper meaning; a beneath-the-surface lesson about God's truth and his kingdom. For example, the parable of the leaven* (see Matthew 13:33) describes the simple transformation of dough into bread by the inclusion of the yeast. In like manner, we are transformed by God's kingdom when we allow His word and Spirit to take root in our hearts. And in turn we are called to be the leaven that transforms the society in which we live and work.

For example, why should a shepherd go through a lot of bother and even risk his life to find one lost sheep when ninety-nine are in his safe keeping? The shepherd's concern for one lost sheep and his willingness to risk his own life for it tells us a lot about God's concern for his children. God's love for us is made clear in this parable.

15 1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them. 3 So he told them this parable: 4 *"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not*

* leaven: an ingredient like yeast or baking powder that causes dough, etc. to fill with bubbles of gas and thus lightens the resulting bread or cake.

leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

(Luke 15: 1-7)

It is to the sinner that Jesus brings the message of God's love.

5. Parables

There are too many parables to present more than a small number of them. But, here are three of the most famous. Both illustrate Love, the Love that God has and that we should have as well for the sinner, especially one who finally understands his folly and returns to the fold, and the Love that we must have for each other without any prejudice.

(a) The Prodigal* Son

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; 12 and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. 15 So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have fed on the

* prodigal: recklessly wasteful or extravagant, as in disposing of goods or money.

pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; 23 and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; 24 for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots*, you killed for him the fatted calf!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

(Luke 15: 11-32)

This parable illustrates that God's love is beyond apparent justice, beyond reason and that He always yearns for the return of a sinner. How can justice or reason apply to a change

* harlot: a prostitute.

in consciousness? With what part of our being do we see and then understand? For such a change, no law can be written. The righteous are His already; they have His Love. But they are not to be self-righteous,* or jealous of their position in His eyes. They are to Love with His own Love; to yearn as He does for the return of their wandering brothers. Jesus illustrates this point in another well-known parable.

(b) The Pharisee and the Publican

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: 10 *"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week, I give tithes** of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

(Luke 18: 9-14)

Humility is the lesson of this familiar parable. The praying Pharisee's pride in his goodness blocked out the love God asks us all to have for each other. The Pharisee was so busy congratulating himself for not being like other men, it never occurred to him that he was not much like God either. In contrast, the kneeling tax collector recognized the vast gulf between God and himself and, consequently, "went down to his house justified." Because of prideful ego in human nature,

* self-righteous: someone convinced that only he is right while intolerant of other views.

** tithe: *Christianity*. a tenth part of produce, personal income, or profits, contributed for the support of the church.

it is difficult to be humble. Yet it is plain that Jesus wants those who Love God to be aware of the blindness to others that their own pride causes. Overcoming pride will elevate human nature so that self-righteousness no longer has any place. Jesus wants humanity to aspire and open both inner and outer eyes while humbly pursuing Truth.

(c) The Good Samaritan

The title of this parable itself has come to mean a stranger who shows kindness to another person who is in difficulty. The parable emphasizes the need for true compassion that God demands. Here is the parable from Luke's Gospel that so clearly brings out the commandment to Love our fellow humans.

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "*What is written in the law? How do you read?*" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "*You have answered right; do this, and you will live.*" 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, 34 and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you*

when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

(Luke 10: 25-37)

Responding to the lawyer who asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus makes it clear that any human being in need is our neighbour. By casting one of the Samaritans (men much despised by the Jews because the religion of the Samaritans, although similar to Judaism, was considered heretical*), in the role of the compassionate neighbour, Jesus challenges his audience. He seems to be saying: If a Samaritan, whom you consider an outcast, will rescue a Jew in trouble, what a reflection it is on you and your religion if, in indifference, you pass by those in need. Through Jesus and the Christian religion the commandment to love one's neighbour has become basic to Western and even much of world thought. Remembering the Jewish origins of Jesus' thought, the same rule is to be found in Leviticus of the Torah:

18 You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19: 18)

However, in the Old Testament this commandment to love is buried in a large collection of other commandments. From Jesus, the commandment to Love becomes distinct and a basic way of life. This commandment to love all of humanity along with the commandment to love God are fundamental.

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"
37 And he said to him, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your*

* heretical (heresy): unorthodox opinions or dogma strongly unacceptable by a religion.

mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

(Matt 22:36-40)

Once more, Jesus reaffirms his Jewish background by declaring the most basic statement of Jewish faith. Almost the same words are spoken by Moses as he repeats the commandment that these words are to be recited daily and taught to the children through all the generations. And indeed this clear statement of faith is still repeated daily by religious Jews, even four times a day. Its importance in both meaning and ritual is so fundamental to Judaism that this statement which is said in prayers daily is given a name, the Sh'ma.

4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; 5 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

(Deuteronomy 6: 4)

6. Jesus also teaches as a rabbi

The form the confrontations take between Jesus as rabbi and the representatives of the rabbinical tradition are clear in the question and answer form in which certain of his teachings appear in the Gospels. Perhaps the model is the Mishna (see Note), one of the most ancient of Judaic holy texts, where one of the styles used to make points is the question and answer.

"A woman had seven husbands (in series, not in parallel): whose wife will she be in the life to come" ? (Matt. 22: 23-33)

30 ... in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

"Is it lawful for a devout Jew to pay taxes to the Roman authorities? "

15 Then the Pharisees (see Note) went and took counsel how to entangle him in his talk. 16 And they sent their disciples to him, ... saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "*Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?* 19 *Show me the money for the tax.*" And they brought him a coin. 20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*" 22 When they heard it, they marveled; and they left him and went away.

(Matt. 22:15-22)

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17-22)

17 ... a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him,19 *You know the commandments:* ... 20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." 21 And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "*You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*" 22 At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "*How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!*" 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "*Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*"

"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1-6)

18 1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." 4 *Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*"

With this method of teaching, the one who puts the question sets up the opportunity for Rabbi Jesus to drive home the point, with the clarity and authority of his answer.

7. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:29)

Along with the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, the great teaching, The Sermon on the Mount, found in St. Matthew's gospel, is the foundation of Western Civilization's moral and ethical code. In the Sermon, Jesus teaches as if with divine power and authority, and by this seeming empowerment makes possible a higher level of consciousness in following the Law. For Christians, next to the Ten Commandments as an expression of God's will, the eight beatitudes (5:3-12) have been revered for expressing succinctly* the values on which Jesus placed priority. In the Sermon, Jesus wants all to know that God has reached out to the whole of humanity in all its diversity, and they, who would enter the kingdom of God must develop a new consciousness. Jesus especially teaches these beatitudes to the disciples who are to be *the salt of the earth and the light of the world* as they go about bringing the words of Jesus to the people (5:13-16).

* succinct(ly): short, accurate statement(s) or explanation that is clear and to the point.

Matt. 5 — 1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him.
2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

(a) The Beatitudes

"*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" meaning that Love has no boundaries and even those who can find no real relation to God are yet blessed by Him. So Jesus, as a bringer of God's Word is saying that even the people who cannot find God are to be loved and thereby, blessed. So Jesus asks of God what he demands of humanity as well. The evildoer himself is a victim, so can we... can He... judge the poor in spirit? Compassion is necessary.

3 "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

4 "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*"

5 "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*"

6 "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*"

7 "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*"

8 "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*"

9 "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*"

10 "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

11 "*Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*"

12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

15 Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus (5:17-48) presents God's demand not by dispensing with the Law but by asking for a deeper observance that gets to the fundamental reason for God's demands on humanity, i.e., to be "*perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (5:48). And this perfection is perfection in Love. Jesus tells us then, that our virtue should exceed that of the those who seek to understand only the mere letter of the Law.

When He says repeatedly "*You have heard it said... but I say to you...*", Jesus explicitly modifies or corrects what God had said through Moses. He makes the demand of the Law more penetrating (e.g., by prohibiting not only killing but anger as well, not only adultery but also lust); he forbids altogether what the Law allows (no divorce, no oath); and he turns from the Law to its opposite (no retaliation (Deut.19:21), but rather generosity to offenders; not hating enemies (Deut.7:2) but loving them). In other words, the Jesus of the Sermon speaks with a confidence that implies that he is closer to God than Moses, and thus makes ethical demands of mankind with all the assurance of the God of Sinai.

17 Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.

*18 For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota,** not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

19 Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

* bushel: a measure of about eight gallons often in the shape of a basket used by farmers.

*** iota: very small amount.

20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let us think that since the time of the giving of the Law to Moses, humanity had evolved, so that the Love that God has for us is the Love that we need to have for God and for each other. And that means all of humanity... To obey God means to go beyond the letter of the Law. To obey God requires Love, Love that flows meaningfully from one to all, from God and to God. This new kind of Love, which is without any romantic overtones was and is called by the Greek word *agape*.

Let's see some of the lines from the Sermon that have echoed through the 2000 years since the time of Jesus. Jesus tells us to 'turn the other cheek'. To whom? To your enemies, who you may have thought of as Godless people. It can be said that his meaning is to clean violence from your heart. Jesus speaks to the mass of people sitting at his feet. Love has to be in the process of justice. Simply to judge by the outward act (a smack on the cheek) is insufficient. So He says "*Love your enemies; do good to them; Bless them that despitefully harm you, etc.*" (43)

21 "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'

22 But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.

23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

25 Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison;

26 truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

28 But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members* than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

32 But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear** falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'

34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

(b) A New Commandment

In 5:38-48, is one of the most famous teachings of Jesus. Instead of 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' which is part of the Law of Moses, in 38-39, Jesus gives humanity a new commandment: Do not take revenge; Forgive those who hurt

* member: a part of the body such as an arm or leg.

** swear: to call on God to witness your promise.

you rather than take the revenge allowed by the Mosaic Law of 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' And Jesus demands humanity to go even further when he commands humanity to *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*. (See also the Lord's Prayer below.)

38 *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'*

39 *But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;*

40 *and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well;*

41 *and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*

42 *Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.*

43 *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

44 *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

45 *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

46 *For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*

47 *And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*

48 *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

(c) How to Pray

In 6:1-18 Jesus makes us think of how one who is truly devoted to God should manifest this holy devotion in everyday life: almsgiving, prayer, fasting, and so on. His warnings here are not against sincere godly practices but against ostentation*.

* ostentation: using one's wealth in a showy way for all to see.

Chapter 6

1 *"Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

2 *"Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

3 *But when you give alms*, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,*

4 *so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

5 *"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

The Lord's Prayer, known so well by all practicing Christians and others, is a petition asking God to bring about His kingdom. The Prayer then continues by asking God to let the petitioner to share in the coming of the kingdom. This will involve God's judgment, so the petitioner asks for forgiveness on the criterion of forgiving others. Finally, the prayer asks for the strength in the dangerous struggle to overcome evil forces.

6 *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

7 *"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.*

8 *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

9 *Pray then like this:*

* alms: money or goods given to the poor or needy.

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed* be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For if you forgive men their trespasses,** your heavenly
Father also will forgive you;
but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will
your Father forgive your trespasses.*

(d) The Golden Rule and Other Instructions

In 6:19-7, Jesus provides further instructions on behaviour for the Kingdom. These touch on total dedication to God, as opposed to worrying about things of this world. Examining oneself carefully rather than examining others is urged; God's generosity in answering prayers is assured; and the Golden Rule (7:12) is given: "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

16 "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

*17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,
18 that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

* hallowed: some thing, place or words taken to be sacred or holy.

** trespasses: an old fashioned word meaning sins or crimes.

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal,
20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light;

23 but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.*

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

As God takes care of the creatures of nature, He will also care for you, so do not concern yourself with accumulating riches. But rather prepare yourself to enter His kingdom.

26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

27 And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit** to his span of life?

28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin:

29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

* Mammon: riches and greed in the form of a false god and regarded as a source of evil and corruption.

** cubit: an ancient measure of length.

31 *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'*

32 *For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*

34 *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.*

Chapter 7

1 "Judge not, that you be not judged.

2 *For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.*

3 *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*

4 *Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?*

5 *You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

6 *"Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.*

7 "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

8 For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

9 *Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?*

10 *Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?*

11 *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

12 So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the Law and the prophets. (The Golden Rule)

13 *"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way*

is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those that find it are few.

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous* wolves.

16 You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?

17 So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit.

18 A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 Thus you will know them by their fruits.

21 "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

24 "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock;

25 and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

26 And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand;

27 and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

28 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,

* ravenous: ferocious and greedy.

29 for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

8:1 When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.

The conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount confirms the special status of Jesus not only as Rabbi but as Prophet. (Matt. 7:28-8:1)

8. Jesus as a Prophet whose coming was predicted

That identification of Jesus as a Prophet was a means both of affirming his continuity with the prophets of Israel and of asserting his superiority to them as the Prophet whose coming they had predicted and to whose authority they had been prepared to yield. God tells Moses, to tell the people,

15 "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) from among you, from your brethren — him you shall heed."

(Deut. 18:15-22)

In the New Testament and in later Christian writers, the prophet-to-come is taken to be Jesus. We are to take Jesus as the one Prophet in whom the teaching of Moses was fulfilled and yet superseded, the one Rabbi who both satisfied the Law of Moses and transcended it; for "the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Our Father

One of the striking features of the New Testament is the title "Father" for God. He is called by no other name. The Sermon on the Mount often asks humanity to interact with *Our*

Father who art in heaven. Therefore, if God is pleased to become the Father of his people, this must mean that He is willing to enter into such a deep personal relationship with humanity that no name will be in any way needed to distinguish Him from His children. The command to love him with all our hearts, souls and minds thus has the best prospect of fulfilment if God, in deep love for us, is willing to become our very own Father. What child is there whom his father does not love? As John put it:

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are".

(1 John 3:1)

In The Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus ascend the mountain to give a new law to his people just as Moses went up Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, the Law, from God.

In John's Gospel, we can see Jesus' connection to Moses emphasized:

"The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ".

(John 1:17)

According to the New Testament, the obedience that had been demanded by God for the Torah is now being transferred to the teaching of Jesus. If we read the Sermon on the Mount, we can see clearly that there is a focus on the connection to the Mosaic tradition. However, Jesus goes beyond the Law. Temple ritual, which is so important in the Torah, has no place in the Sermon.

It is said that in the comments of the rabbis, such as the Talmud, many titles were given to the Law: light of the world, water of life, bread of life, good shepherd, way, truth and life. In the Gospels these titles are now applied to Jesus. John clearly makes the statement that in the revelation of Jesus a new

law, a life-giving law, now applies. The revelation of God is now no longer just in Moses, but, in fact, chiefly to be found in the words of Jesus. It has been said that the hundreds of laws of the Torah are now reduced to just two commandments by Jesus.

37 "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."

(Matthew 22:37-38)

34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another"

(John 13: 34-35)

9. The Christian Theology of Love

The main purpose of this essay is to present the Love that Jesus brought to humanity through his ministry and his crucifixion as found mainly in the four Gospels and from comments and experiences of Paul. The doctrines and theology of the developing Christian churches came from these accounts as well. The theme of this essay is Love and so one important aspect of Christian theology must be presented.

According to Christian theology, Jesus is the Son of God and is also God. So the sacrifice on the cross is that of God himself. That is, God incarnated Himself as Jesus. This was made necessary because of the sinful nature of man, which made it impossible for man to obey the Law of Moses as he should. Since we fail to keep the Law perfectly, we fall under its curse. Jesus (God) redeemed us from the curse of the Law by bearing humanity's curse as a substitute for us. He was made sin for us so that we might not receive the punishment our sins deserve. He carried our sins, and the penalty of our sins, by his Crucifixion.

21 God made him who had no sin to be a sin offering for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2 Cor. 5:21)

Jesus, being sinless, did not need to die, but he willingly died to pay the penalty for us of our sins. The righteous died for the unrighteous. He received punishment, which we deserve, so we could receive forgiveness, even though we do not deserve it. He received death so that we might receive life. Jesus (God) loved us so much that He willingly died in utter shame and pain for our sins. On the cross, he bore all the world's sin because of His Love. The cross was the focus of Jesus' mission as a human. His job was not done until he was crucified.

The only way to complete His story of love is to love Him in return. Our love for Him is to be shown by Faith in God's (Jesus) sacrifice of Himself as Redeemer of our sins. You show this Faith by Baptism (see Note) and participating in the Eucharist (see note), the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. He told us to participate in these reminders of his death because his death, and our participation in his death, is the key to our salvation.

Is Jesus God? Was it Jesus/God who died on the cross? Was it God who sacrificed Himself so that humanity could be forever sinless, if humans have the faith to believe in the Crucifixion and Resurrection (see below) as their Salvation (see Note)? To accept these as the truth are matters of faith. This is the faith that makes a Christian a Christian. This is the faith that has helped to shape Western civilization because it is an essential element of that civilization. The faith is stated succinctly in the Nicene Creed (see Note), written around 400 CE. It still is the basic Christian statement of faith for both Eastern and Western churches.

10. De-Judaization of Jesus

The beginnings of this de-Judaization of Christianity are visible already within the New Testament with Paul's decision to "turn to the Gentiles".

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

(Acts 13:46)

After having begun his preaching in the synagogues, and then with the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, the Christian movement increasingly became gentile rather than Jewish in its members and outlook. In that setting, the Jewish elements of the life of Jesus had to be explained to gentile readers. For example, in John 2:6, the phrase, "...for the Jewish rites of purification,..." is felt necessary in the gospel of John to inform the increasing number of gentile readers

6 Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

While the action of the New Testament begins in Jerusalem, it ends in Rome where the two great disciples of Jesus, Peter and Paul were finally martyred.*

Affirmation of Jewish origins of Jesus by Paul

Recently, scholars have not only put the picture of Jesus

* martyr: to kill a person who would rather suffer death rather than renounce his religious beliefs. (n.) such a person.

back into the setting of first century Judaism; they have also rediscovered the Jewishness of the New Testament, and particularly of Paul. His epistle to the Romans (9-11) is the description of his struggle over the relation between early church and synagogue, concluding with the prediction and the promise: "And so all Israel will be saved" – not, it should be noted, converted to Christianity, but saved, because, in Paul's words, "as regards election they (the Jews) are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:26-29). This reading of the mind of Paul in Romans gives special significance to his many references to the name of Jesus there: from "descended from David according to the flesh... Jesus Christ our Lord" in the first chapter, to "the preaching of Jesus Christ," which "is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations" in the final sentence. Here Jesus is, as Paul says of himself elsewhere, "of the people of Israel..., a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). The very issue of universality, supposedly the distinction between Paul and Judaism, was, for Paul, what made it necessary that Jesus be a Jew. For only through the Jewishness of Jesus could the covenant of God with Israel, the gracious gifts of God, and his irrevocable calling become available to all people in the whole world, also to the Gentiles, who "were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree" – namely, the people of Israel (Rom. 11:17).

Would there have been anti-Semitism if....

No one can consider the topic of Jesus as rabbi and ignore the subsequent history of the relation between the people to whom Jesus belonged and the people who belong to Jesus. That relation runs like a red line through much of the history of Western culture, and after the events of the twentieth century we have a unique responsibility to be aware of it as we study the history of the images of Jesus through the centuries. The question is easier to ask than it is to answer, and it is easier

to avoid than it is to ask at all. But ask it we must: Would there have been such anti-Semitism, would there have been so many pogroms*, would there have been the Holocaust, if every Christian church and every Christian home had focused its devotion on images of Mary not only as Mother of God and Queen of Heaven but also as the Jewish maiden and the New Miriam, and on icons of Christ not only as the Cosmic Christ but also as Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, come to ransom a captive Israel and a captive humanity?

11. Jesus was Jewish

It is clear that Jesus was a Jew. He was born of a Jewish mother, in Galilee, a Jewish part of the world. All of his friends, associates, colleagues, disciples, all of them were Jews. He regularly worshipped in Jewish communal worship, what we call synagogues.** He preached from Jewish scriptures.*** He celebrated the Jewish festivals. He went on pilgrimage to the Great Temple in Jerusalem which was under the authority of priests. He was born, lived, died, and taught as a Jew. This is obvious to any casual reader of the Gospel texts. What's striking is not so much that he was a Jew, but that the Gospels make no pretense that he wasn't. The Gospels have no sense yet that Jesus was anything other than a Jew. The Gospels don't even have a sense that he came to found a new religion, an idea completely foreign to all the Gospel texts, and completely foreign to Paul. That is an idea which comes about only later in the history of Early Christianity. Therefore, to say that he was a Jew should be obvious. But, of course, it should not need to be said because as is well-known, Christianity becomes something other than Judaism by the 2nd century CE, and as a

* pogrom: an organized attack, often murderous, against a Jewish population.

** synagogue: the place of worship and gathering of a Jewish congregation.

*** scriptures: specific writings regarded as sacred by a religious group, e.g. Old Testament.

result, Jesus in retrospect is seen not as a Jew, but as the bringer of a new religion, as the foundation of Christianity.

To the Christian disciples of the first century the conception of Jesus as rabbi was self-evident, to the Christian disciples of the second century it was difficult for the converted Jews to explain to the increasing number of converted gentiles, to the Christian disciples of the third century and beyond, the connection to Judaism had become obscure.

12. Some landmarks of Jesus through history

If we can understand the love that Jesus told us to have for God and each other, then how has this manifested itself over the 2000 years since his crucifixion? And by passing through history you can see that the Love Jesus opened our hearts and minds to is obvious throughout this history. This essay can only mention a few outstanding examples, but your own study of history should help to fill in the details and to find many other instances.

From 400 CE on, the barbarians overran most of the Roman Empire. Their cultures, including their religions, disintegrated upon impact with what was left of Greco-Roman civilization. Thus, Christianity did not really find itself in head-to-head competition with an entrenched pagan religion tightly bound into a stable culture. Rather, Christianity found itself facing primitive cultures that admired the Greco-Roman culture they were conquering by force of arms. That is, the barbarians did not have cities or much art and reading and writing, which was almost unknown to them. As such cultures encountered the Greco-Roman world, they would tend to absorb Christianity under the influence of the far more advanced culture.

Furthermore, the culture of the invading hordes from northern Europe was tribal in nature. When the chiefs or key elders embraced Christianity, mass conversions within that tribe soon followed. Traditionally, religion among the barbarians had

been a community affair. That is why when a barbarian tribe did become Christian it often did so en masse. Thus, Christianity must have made the rapid advances it did because it was able to serve not only as an educative force, but as a socially cohesive one as well.

To the invaders from the north, Christianity then became a major stimulus in stirring them to produce a more advanced civilization. Thus, Christianity may have won quick acceptance because it served as a catalyst in cultural rebuilding. Rather than being a threat, Christianity had become a friend to the barbarians' culture. Settling down around monasteries, churches, castles and so on, the barbarians gave up their wanderings and formed the centres that would become the urban Europe of history.

Martin Luther King Jr.

In modern times, one of the clearest examples of the Love of Jesus applied to a social problem was the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. in the movement which successfully led to the elimination of the racial segregation which degraded the black people of the southern states of the U.S.A. As history tells us, Dr. King's non-violent leadership overcame the white segregationists' attempts to defeat the movement. As Dr. King himself asserted, the foundation of this movement's efforts was the Love brought to humanity by Jesus. But let Dr. King's words speak for themselves.

Criticizing the churches and synagogues of Birmingham for not taking a strong stand against segregation:

"Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformist."

Emphasizing the non-violent but strong nature of the anti-segregation movement:

"Was not Jesus an extremist for love?" "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you."

(Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 1963)

From his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, (Dec. 1964)

"I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and non-violent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule of the land. "

In Conclusion

From the beginnings of Christianity, *agape* was so prevalent that those around the early Christians could say, 'Behold, how they love one another.' But on the other hand, there were debates on what is the truth about Jesus and his ministry, his Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension and of great importance, what was the very nature of this person, Jesus himself. Conflict and debate continued (often of an angry and vicious kind), since varying positions on major theological issues can all equally find support in the Bible. Where these divisions have been translated into Church life and politics, they frequently led to animosities, wars and persecutions among Christians which have made a mockery of the early description of Christians and *agape*.

In spite of the dark chapters in Christian history, this essay wishes to focus on the elevated consciousness that Jesus brought to humanity. So, Christianity is often redeemed from those dark aspects of its history considering the choice, Love, that Jesus gave us. Look again at the answer to the question of the rich young man,



THE REDEEMTOR, by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

17 "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
18 And Jesus said to him,19 "*You know the command-*
ments:" ... 20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have
observed from my youth." 21 And Jesus looking upon him

loved him, and said to him, "*You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*"

(Mark 10. 17- 21)

The answer which Jesus gave pointed beyond just keeping of the basic ethical commandments to a total generosity of self and substance. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, and of the last judgement, the single criterion of judgement is stated:

"Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of one of these, you have done it to me."

(Matthew 25. 31-46)

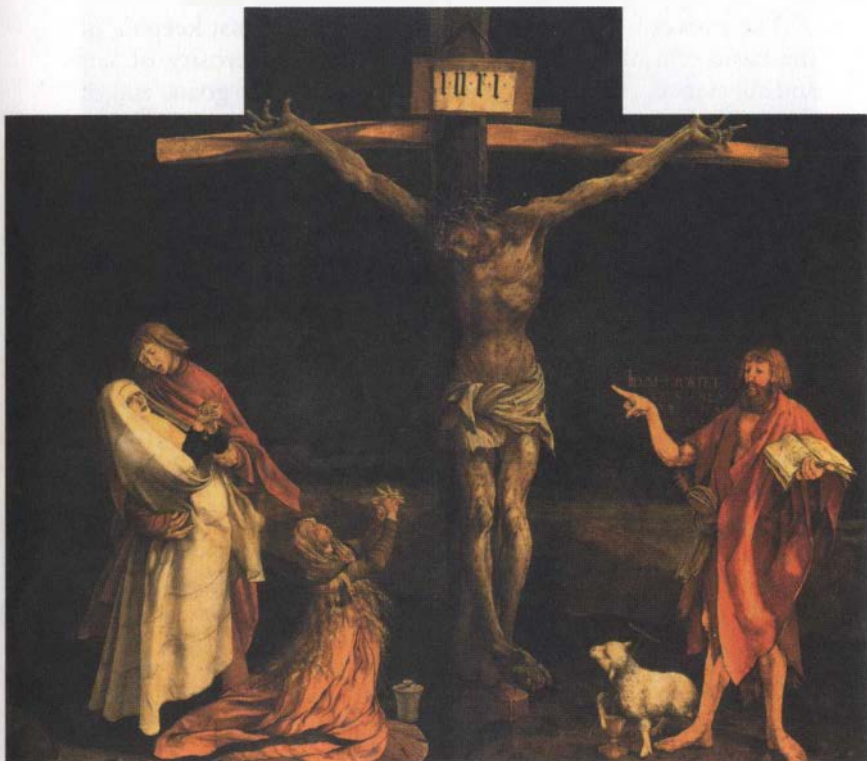
That criterion means that Christian life should be the manifestation of a pervasive quality of Love (*agape*). It is this stress on the transformation of human life into Love which has led through the centuries to the founding of schools and hospitals, and to the care of the poor, and to the recognition of such people as Francis of Assisi as exemplary:

The Brothers shall possess nothing. ...This is the highest degree of that sublime poverty, which has made you, my dearly beloved brethren, heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven, which has made you poor in goods but exalted in virtues.

(Rule of St. Francis, 1223)

As with several other religions, Christianity believes that humanity has free will and each of us can choose our thoughts and actions. To enter upon a life of *agape*, Love of God, humanity and all of God's creation before the love of oneself, is to choose a path that has been and always will remain revealed to humanity because of Jesus of the New Testament.





THE CRUCIFIXION, by Matthias Grünewald (c. 1475-1528)

The Crucifixion

or

The Passion of Jesus

A Brief Background

How did Jesus die? He was crucified. Crucifixion was the method of execution used for outlaws by the Romans at the time of the New Testament. It was not only humiliating, but crucifixion was a particularly cruel death as the Gospels will describe below. Briefly, the victim to be executed was tied to or nailed to a wooden cross. Jesus was nailed. The cross was raised straight up, and the condemned man was left hanging to die in the hot sun. That is, the excruciating torture before dying was the Roman's real instrument of punishment. It is this cross – the cross of the crucifixion – that has become the symbol of Christianity. It symbolizes reconciliation with God through faith in Christ whose life, death, and Resurrection are proof of God's forgiveness of human sin.

Even at such ceremonies as baptism (See Note) or when giving a blessing, a Christian makes the sign of the cross with a hand motion. As the Gospels tell us, Jesus came to the world as a man with a mission and submitted to this cruel death rather than take back one word of his teachings.

Christians believe in an afterlife whereby the soul will be sent either to Heaven where the soul receives bliss by being in the presence of God for eternity, or Hell, where the soul is damned to eternal suffering. Heaven or Hell is determined according to the judgement of God about the life of a human.

To go to heaven means a life of no sin. Obviously, evil acts such as murder, lying, stealing, etc. are sinful acts. Sinful acts are to be avoided. But considering human nature, can a human being live a truly sinless life? According to Christianity, the human cannot. Throughout life, the human will sin according to the demands of human nature. Therefore, God sacrificed Himself in the person of Jesus on the Cross to redeem* the sins of the human, and most importantly God/Jesus redeemed the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. Thus, we humans can all see the great love God has for His creation through this miracle of God coming to humanity as His Own Son, Jesus and allowing Himself to undergo the cruel sacrifice of the Crucifixion.

However, according to Christian dogma**, God makes one more demand of the human in addition to leading as sinless a life as possible. And that demand is Faith in the Crucifixion and its meaning. Without Faith in the truth of the Crucifixion and the resulting forgiveness of sin as has been described in this essay, no human can be judged and go to Heaven. But to the contrary, humans without this Faith are condemned to Hell for eternity. For this reason, Christians with this Faith, try very hard to convert all unbelievers in order to save them from eternal damnation. Christians believe that as God/Jesus has loved them, so must each Christian love all humans and try to save the souls of all unbelieving humans.

15. And he said to them, *Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to everyone.*

16. *He that believes and is baptised shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be damned.*

Mark [16: 15-16]

* redeem: (by Jesus as Saviour) to free (men) from sin by his death on the Cross.

** dogma: a religious or political doctrine(s) accepted as true without proof or explanation.

Old Testament Prophecies

One factor that shaped the Passion (see below) narratives was the Hebrew Scriptures. When early Christians, many of whom were Jews, remembered the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, they did so in the context of their sacred scriptures. They remembered Jesus' death not simply as an historical event but a divine sacrifice. They interpreted the passion of Jesus through various Old Testament passages, especially the song of the suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13- 53:12), certain psalms of lament (Psalms 22, 69), the image of the suffering righteous man (Wisdom 2, 4 and 5), and prophetic passages (Zechariah 9-14). These so-called prophetic passages allowed the Passion narrative to be coloured with divine purpose and interpretive details. Jesus' fate was the fulfillment of God's will revealed through the ages in the sacred writings of Israel. As one notable example, here is the clearest prophecy from the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament.

52:13 Behold, my servant shall prosper,
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.

14 As many were astonished at him –
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the sons of men –
15 so shall he startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which has not been told them they shall see,
and that which they have not heard they shall understand.

53: 1 Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so he opened not his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?

9 And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him;
He has put him to grief;

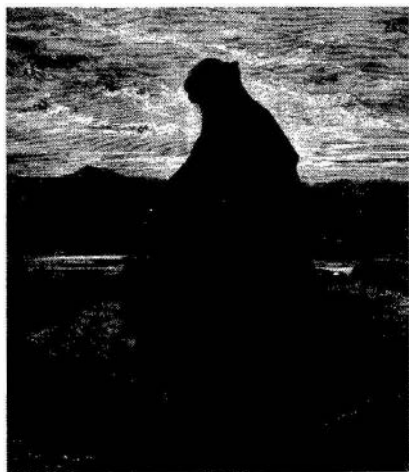
11 After the suffering of his soul,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

(Isaiah 52:13- 53:12)

The Paschal Lamb

At the time of Jesus, a most revered and essential sacrifice was the one offered by devout* Israelites on Passover, and known as the Paschal Lamb. It commemorated God's deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian Bondage (see Appendix). Many Jews would each bring a lamb to the Temple in Jerusalem, and give it to a priest, who would slaughter the animal, sprinkle its blood upon the altar, and burn its entrails and fat. The remainder would be returned to the person who had donated the lamb. The animal was then taken back to the donor's family, which would eat the lamb, along with matza (see *leaven* in glossary), bitter herbs, and other foods that commemorated the freedom from the Egyptian Bondage. This celebration feast is the Passover seder. In one Gospel account, the Crucifixion takes place just as the priests are performing the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb. Thus, the sacrificed Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God.



+ISAIAH, by Gustave Doré

* devout: a very religious person who observes his religious practices very carefully.

The story of the Crucifixion: method of presentation

The story of the Crucifixion will be presented below using chapter and verse from the four canonical Gospels. Although basically the same account is given in each gospel, there are some marked differences. It is not within the scope of this essay to discuss these differences. Instead, the Passion story will be told by blending together the four accounts. In fact, this is the general understanding of most Christians, and only those familiar with the Bible concern themselves with comparing the four Gospels.

The story of the Passion begins:

The priests and scribes decide to kill Jesus

[Mat 26:1] When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples,

[Mat 26:2] *"You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified."*

[Mat 26:3] Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,

[Mat 26:4] and took counsel together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

[Mat 26:5] But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult among the people."

The Betrayer, Judas Iscariot

[Luke 22:3] Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve;

[Luke 22:4] he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them.

[Luke 22:5] And they were glad, and engaged to give him money.

[Luke 22:6] So he agreed, and sought an opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.

The Preparation for the Passover

[Luke 22:7] Then came the day of unleavened bread, on which the Passover lamb (see Note) had to be sacrificed.

[Luke 22:8] So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "*Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.*"

[Luke 22:9] They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?"

[Luke 22:10] He said to them, "*Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house which he enters,*

[Luke 22:11] *and tell the householder, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?'*

[Luke 22:12] *And he will show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready.*"

[Luke 22:13] And they went, and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

The Last Supper — Jesus talks and prophesies of the events to come to the twelve disciples

[Mat 26:20] When it was evening, he sat at table with the twelve disciples;

[Mat 26:21] and as they were eating, he said, "*Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.*"

[Mat 26:22] And they were very sorrowful, and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?"

[Mat 26:23] He answered, "*He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me, will betray me.*

[Mat 26:24] *The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.*"

[Mat 26:25] Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Is it I, Master?" He said to him, "*You have said so.*"



THE LAST SUPPER, by João Filipe

The Eucharist: The command to remember the sacrifice of the crucifixion

[Mat 26:26] Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "*Take, eat; this is my body.*"

[Mat 26:27] And he took a cup of wine, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "*Drink of it, all of you;*

[Mat 26:28] *for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

[Mat 26:29] *I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*"

Love replaces the laws of the Old Testament in the eyes of God... a new covenant

[John 13:34] *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

[John 13:35] *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Yet Jesus knows that human nature is still weak, and he warns the disciple, Simon-Peter.

[John 13:36] Simon-Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward."

[John 13:37] Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

[John 13:38] Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times."

Jesus is One with God... Jesus is God the Son

[John 14:5] Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"

[John 14:6] Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.

[John 14:7] *If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him."*

[John 14:8] Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied."

[John 14:9] Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'

[John 14:10] *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.*

The promise of the Holy Spirit as a counsellor to the faithful

[John 14:15] *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

[John 14:16] *And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever,*

[John 14:26] *But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

Jesus' commandment that Faith in his mission is necessary for heaven after death

[John 15:5] *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

[John 15:6] *If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.*

[John 15:12] *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

[John 15:13] *Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."*

Jesus' promise of his Resurrection after the Crucifixion

[John 16:16] *"A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me."*

[John 16:22] *"So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."*

The promise of eternal Heaven to the faithful disciples and to all keep faith in Jesus and his mission

[John 17:24] *"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which you have given me in your love for me before the foundation of the world.*

[Mark 14:31] *But he said vehemently, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.*

And so ends the "The Last Supper".

Although Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane to God his Father to be relieved of the suffering to follow, he accepts whatever role he must play.

[Mat 26:36] Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, *"Sit here, while I go yonder and pray."*

[Mat 26:37] And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

[Mat 26:38] Then he said to them, *"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."*

[Mat 26:39] And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."*

[Mat 26:40] And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, *"So, could you not watch with me one hour?"*

[Mat 26:41] *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

[Mat 26:42] Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, *"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done."*

[Mat 26:43] And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

[Mat 26:44] So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

[Mat 26:45] Then he came to the disciples and said to them, *"Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."*

[Mat 26:46] *Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."*

Jesus is betrayed and taken prisoner

[Luke 22:47] While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him;

[Luke 22:48] but Jesus said to him, "*Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?*"

[Luke 22:49] And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"

[Mat 26:51] And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

[Mat 26:52] Then Jesus said to him, "*Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.*"

[Mat 26:53] *Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*

[Mat 26:54] *But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"*

[Luke 22:52] Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "*Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?*"

[Luke 22:53] *When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.*"

[Luke 22:54] Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance.

Jesus is accused of blasphemy by the high priest of the temple

[Mat 26:57] Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

[Mat 26:58] But Peter followed him at a distance, as far as



CHRIST ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, by Botticelli (1445-1510)

the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.

[Mat 26:59] Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death,

[Mat 26:60] but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward

[Mat 26:61] and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'"

[Mat 26:62] And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"

[Mat 26:63] But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

[Mat 26:64] Jesus said to him, "*You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*"

[Mat 26:65] Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy.

[Mat 26:66] What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."

[Mat 26:67] Then they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him.

Peter denies Jesus three times

[Mat 26:69] Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a maid came up to him, and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean."

[Mat 26:70] But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean."

[Mat 26:71] And when he went out to the porch, another maid saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

[Mat 26:72] And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."

[Mat 26:73] After a little while the bystanders came up

and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you."

[Mat 26:74] Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the cock crowed.

[Mat 26:75] And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus is led to Pontius Pilate (see Note), the Roman governor for judgement

[Mat 27:1] When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death;

[Mat 27:2] and they bound him and led him away and delivered him to Pilate the governor.

[Mat 27:11] Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "*You have said so.*"

[Mat 27:12] But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer.

[Mat 27:13] Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?"

[Mat 27:14] But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly.

The crowd demands that Jesus be crucified

[Mat 27:15] Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted.

[Mat 27:16] And they had then a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.

[Mat 27:17] So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?"

[Mat 27:18] For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

[Mat 27:19] Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream."

[Mat 27:20] Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

[Mat 27:21] The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

[Mat 27:22] Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified."

[Mat 27:23] And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified."

[Mat 27:24] So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

[Mat 27:25] And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

The cruel preparation of Jesus for the crucifixion

[Mat 27:26] Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged* Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

[Mat 27:27] Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him.

[Mat 27:28] And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him,

[Mat 27:29] and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

[Mat 27:30] And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.

[Mat 27:31] And when they had mocked him, they

* scourge: to whip severely.



THE MOCKING OF CHRIST, by Matthias Grünewald

stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

The crucifixion of Jesus and the various people who witnessed it
The death of Jesus on the Cross

[Luke 23:26] And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.



CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS (detail), by Hieronymus Bosch

[Luke 23:32] Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

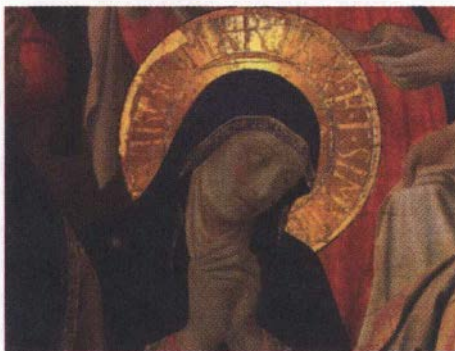
[Luke 23:33] And when they came to the place which is called Calvary or The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left.

[Luke 23:34] And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* And they cast lots** to divide his garments.

[John 19:25] So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (see the painting of the Crucifixion)

[John 19:26] When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

[John 19:27] Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.



* The words that Jesus said while on the Cross are given special reverence by Christians. These words are known as The Seven Last Words on the Cross; they are underlined here to identify them. The death of Jesus on the Cross is told slightly differently in each of the canonical Gospels. However, these last spoken words of Jesus are all included in The Seven Last Words on the Cross.

** cast lots: to gamble for money, and so on by choosing straws, etc.

Jesus is mocked while suffering on the cross.

[Luke 23:35] And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

[Luke 23:36] The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar,

[Luke 23:37] and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

[Luke 23:38] There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

*Jesus promises salvation to the crucified criminal who shows faith in Jesus' holiness**

[Luke 23:39] One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

[Luke 23:40] But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

[Luke 23:41] And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

[Luke 23:42] And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

[Luke 23:43] And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

[Luke 23:44] It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,

[Mark 15:34] And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Elo-i, Elo-i, lama sabach-thani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

[Mat 27:51] And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split;

* Along with Jesus, two criminals were also crucified. Their respective attitudes toward Jesus should be noted.

[John 19:28] After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst."

[John 19:29] A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop* and held it to his mouth.

[John 19:30] When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

[Luke 23:46] Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

The descent from the Cross and the burial of Jesus

[John 19:32] So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him;

[John 19:33] but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

[John 19:34] But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

[Mark 15:42] And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

[Mark 15:43] Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.

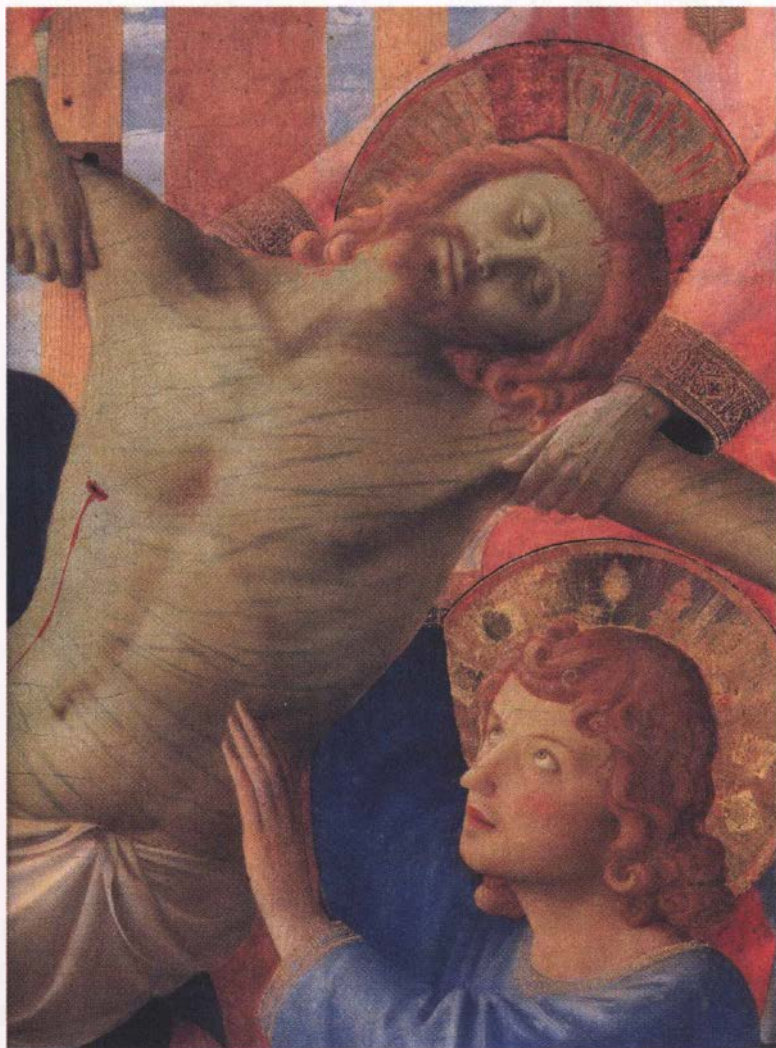
[Mark 15:44] And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead.

[Mark 15:45] And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.

[Mark 15:46] And he bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud (see Note), and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

* hyssop: a Biblical plant, used for sprinkling in the ritual practices of the Hebrews.

[Mark 15:47] Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.



THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS, by Fra Angelico (detail)

The Resurrection

[Mark 16:1] And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.

[Mark 16:2] And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen.

[Mark 16:3] And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?"

[Mark 16:4] And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; it was very large.

[Luke 24:3] But when they went in they did not find the body.

[Luke 24:4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel

[Matt 28:5] But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

[Matt 28:6] He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

[Matt 28:7] Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you."

[Luke 24:10] Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles;

[Luke 24:11] but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

[Luke 24:13] That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

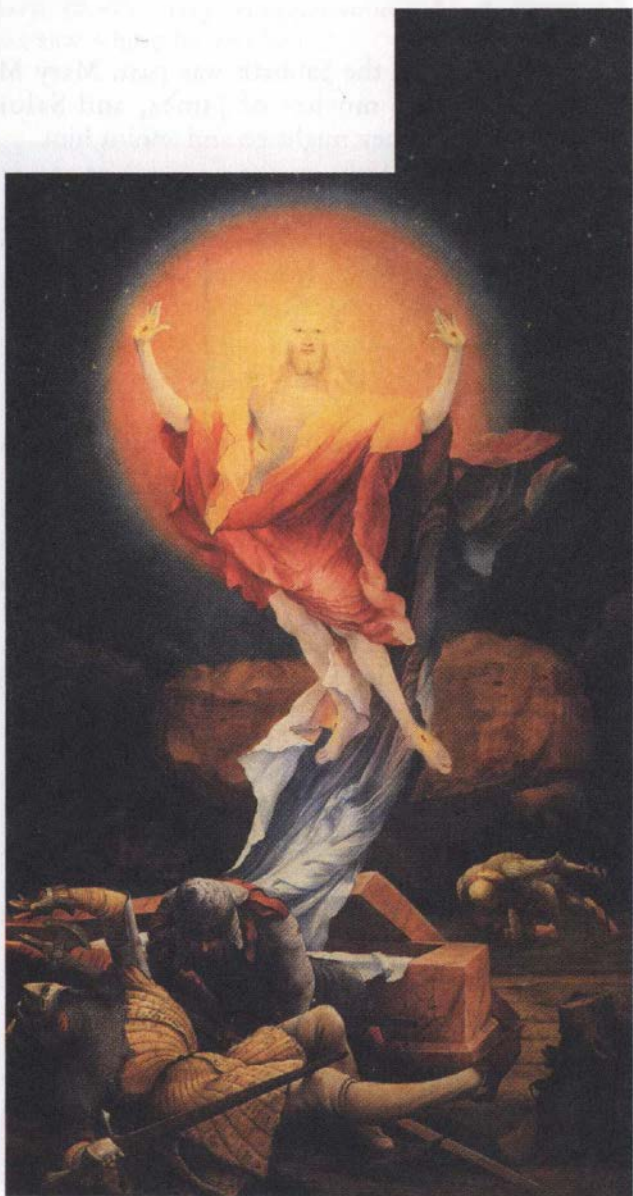
[Luke 24:14] and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

[Luke 24:15] While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

[Luke 24:16] But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

[Matt 28:9] And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

[Matt 28:10] Then Jesus said to them, "*Do not be afraid; go*



THE RESURRECTION, by Matthias Grünewald

and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

[Matt 28:16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

[Matt 28:17] And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.

[John 20:26] Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "*Peace be with you.*"

[John 20:27] Then he said to Thomas, "*Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.*"

[John 20:28] Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

[John 20:29] Jesus said to him, "*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*"

[Mark 16:15] And he said to them, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.*

[Mark 16:16] *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*"

The Ascension

[Luke 24:50] Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

[Luke 24:51] While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.

[Luke 24:52] And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

[Luke 24:53] and were continually in the Temple blessing God.

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THE SUPPER AT EMMAUS, by Rembrandt (1606-1669)

The meaning of the Resurrection

The followers of Jesus were absolutely convinced that he had been raised from the dead and had been taken away into heaven as a proof of his identity as Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He was the crucified and then risen Lord. The Resurrection brings a different perspective to the understanding of Jesus. If anyone thought of him as only a prophet, as a messenger of God, that changes when he himself is raised by God from the dead. And it is really the belief in the Resurrection experience that leads the disciples to come to think of Jesus as more than even a prophet, as the Messiah... The Redeemer of Humanity from Sin... . He is the one who has been glorified and ascended into heaven as Son of God by God.

In his final commandments to the disciples before his Ascension, he clearly identifies himself and directs them to bring his message to the world.

44 Then he said to them, *"These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."* 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and said to them, *"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, ..."*

(Luke 24: 44-47)

And exhorts them to

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation."

(Mark 16:15)



THE ASCENSION,
by Gustave Doré



MOSES COMING DOWN FROM SINAI, by Gustave Doré

Appendix

The Revelation to Moses

The message of Jesus which furthered the evolution of humanity was based on the previous evolutionary developments found in the history of the Jewish people. Almost all that Jesus taught can be found in the demand God made on the Jewish people to interact ethically, to interact with concern for the other. These Laws are to be found in the Torah given to the Jewish people through Moses after they escaped from the bondage in Egypt. This series of events is essential to understand if the reader is to understand Jesus. Therefore, this essay will also introduce Moses, the escape from bondage in Egypt and the giving of the Law. The greatest Actor in that drama is God, with Moses being His messenger.

Jesus said that he had not come to change the Law even a little.

Matth. 5:17 *"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. 18 For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven"..*

What then is the Law that Jesus is referring to? As a Jewish rabbi who knew the sacred Jewish scriptures well enough to teach and argue about them in the synagogue Jesus certainly knew the Law very well. It is important, therefore, to understand The Old Testament

background and basic content.

The account of the giving of the Law, which is also the story of the creation of the nation of Israel – of the Jewish people – is to be found in the second book of the Torah (see Note), Exodus. The hero of the story is Moses. But more than being a hero, Moses, after Jesus, is the second most important individual in the entire Bible. That means for the Jewish people who accept only the Old Testament, he is the greatest of the prophets.

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses,
whom the Lord knew face to face.

(Deuteronomy 34:10)

And so let us now read the story of the giving of the Law by God. By giving the Law to the Jewish people, God created a new nation and made a covenant with them. He created a people. For the Jewish people even today, this covenant between God and them is as strong as ever. On the other hand, for those who accept Jesus and his message, he came and while maintaining the Law, he gave it new depth and meaning.

Bondage in Egypt

However, before God gave the Law and thus creating the new nation of Israel, He liberated the Hebrew people from the bondage and slavery that was put upon them by the Egyptian Pharaoh. In these events, Moses was God's agent to accomplish both the liberation and the giving of the Law. Earlier in Genesis, the first Book of the Torah, it is told how the Hebrew people were invited to live in Egypt in peace and prosperity (Chapters. 40-50). But as the generations passed, their numbers increased, and a later Pharaoh felt that the increasing population of these non-Egyptians was threatening. So, the Pharaoh of that time turned them into slaves. The oppression continued and even worsened when the Pharaoh declared that all male Hebrew infants were to be drowned in the Nile River.

Exodus 1:22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

The birth of Moses and his early years

One Hebrew mother, in desperation to save his life, set her infant son adrift in a basket made of reeds. To the mother's happiness, the basket was found by a daughter of the cruel Pharaoh, who quietly took the infant back to the palace and raised him as an Egyptian prince. She named the child Moses. The princess hired the true mother of Moses to care for her own son. Perhaps that is how he was able to have some feeling for the plight* of the oppressed Hebrew people.

Let us note here the similarity between the infancy of Jesus (Matt 2:13) and Moses: at their births, both of their lives were threatened by cruel kings, who set out to kill all Hebrew male infants. Both had a relation with the land of Egypt.

Exodus goes on to tell us that Moses was raised in the royal Egyptian house and grew to be a strong young man and a prince of Egypt. However, his sense of justice causes a radical change in his life. He sees an Egyptian cruelly beating a Hebrew slave. This makes him very angry. Thinking that no one is watching, he kills the Egyptian to save the Hebrew slave. However, the next day, when he separates two Hebrew slaves who are fighting, one of them angrily taunts Moses that it is known that Moses had killed the Egyptian. Moses immediately understands that he is in danger. And indeed Pharaoh orders Moses killed, so he flees to Midian, and thus ends his princely life.

Even as he flees, Moses once more shows his strong sense of justice. He comes to a well where several shepherds are tormenting the seven daughters of a Midian priest. He protects them from the shepherds. The incidents seem to be related. In all three, Moses shows a deep commitment to fighting injustice. Furthermore, his concerns are not narrow-minded. He intervenes at first when a non-Jew oppresses a Jew, then when two Jews fight, and when non-Jews oppress other non-Jews.

So the Midian women take him home to meet their father. The daughters tell him about Moses' bravery. Needing a safe place to live and work, he becomes a shepherd for the father, who is a priest of the Midians, and, in fact, Moses is given one of the priest's daughters to marry. Moses then settles down in Midian, where he leads a

*plight: a condition of extreme hardship or danger.

pastoral* life for several years when suddenly the first of several great encounters between God and Moses occurs.

The Burning Bush

One day, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a fire blazing forth from a bush. Moses is startled to see the bush all aflame but not burning. The symbolism of this miracle is powerful. In a world in which nature itself is worshiped, God shows that He rules over it. When he goes to examine this miraculous sight, God calls out from the bush,

4 "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "*Moses, Moses!*" And he said, "Here am I." 5 Then He said, "*Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*" 6 And He said, "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob* (see note)." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."

(Exodus 3:4-6)

This is Moses' first encounter with God. God tells him

9 "*And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel* (see note) *has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.* 10 *Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.*" 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"

(Exodus 3: 9-11).

The more Moses refuses, the more God insists. It is obvious that Moses totally lacks the confidence to take up the task God has given

* pastoral: simple country life; relating to shepherds, their work and way of life.

him. However, as Moses performs the necessary commands given him by God, his character develops.

13 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "*I am who I am.*" And he said, "*Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'*" 15 God also said to Moses, "*Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.'*"

(Exodus 3: 13-15)

The Confrontation with the Pharaoh

God persuades Moses that he must go to Pharaoh. He gives Moses, who still lacks confidence, a companion, his brother Aaron, and a staff* by which some of the miracles God will perform can be realised.

8 And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 9 "*When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'*" 10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord commanded; Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.

(Exodus 7: 8-10)

Perhaps one of the most famous demands in all history is the one Moses directs at Pharaoh: "Let my people go!" Three millennia later, this verse has been taken by oppressed groups. It became a cry of black slaves in the American South. In one of their most famous folksongs, they sang: "Go down Moses, Way down in Egypt-land,

* staff: a stick with some special use such as for walking or to show authority.

And tell old Pharaoh, To let my people go!"

God sends plagues* on the Egyptians to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. At the same time God hardens Pharaoh's heart, even though there are plagues of frogs, lice, flies, locusts, death of livestock, boils, hail, and darkness. All the ten plagues are disastrous to the Egyptians but did not affect the Jews. Yet Pharaoh only becomes more stubborn.

But why did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Had God not hardened Pharaoh's heart, it would have deprived the Egyptian king of free will. Of course he would have then allowed the Hebrew slaves to go; not out of choice, but out of terror. By hardening Pharaoh's heart, the Egyptian king no longer feared the kind of physical devastation that would terrify and cause instant obedience from a normal man. There was nothing, however, to stop Pharaoh from intellectually and emotionally recognizing the injustices he had inflicted on the Hebrew slaves, and then by his own free will letting them go. But moral responses were not Pharaoh's concerns. Here was a contest of power between him and the God of the Israelites. Only when the Egyptian firstborn started dying, did he, the great Pharaoh, finally realize that he was facing a Force immeasurably greater than his own. And perhaps being a firstborn himself, he wanted the Hebrews out in order to save his own life. It is only by free will that God expects humanity to follow His commands. Altogether, God sent ten plagues, the last of which is the most horrendous.

The Passover

Finally, the Passover (see Note) occurs. As the Tenth Plague, God vows to kill the firstborn of every family in Egypt. The Israelites are commanded to put the blood of a male lamb without blemish on their doorposts. The Angel of Death will then pass over these households and not kill the Hebrew firstborn. All of the households in Egypt thus suffer the loss of the eldest son.

Only then does Pharaoh finally realize the power of God and release his Hebrew slaves. Moses and Aaron will now lead their people away into the desert of the Sinai Peninsula. Moses, having been warned by God, knows that the Pharaoh will again change his mind

** plague: a disease that quickly spreads to many of the people of a region.

and pursue his Hebrew slaves. Moses spurs his people to leave in great haste with little time to gather necessities. We must imagine that they had to leave within a matter of hours.

"And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any provisions."

(Exodus 12:39)

But before they could cross the Sea of Reeds and find freedom, as predicted, Pharaoh had a change of heart and sent his chariots out to stop them. In the next great miracle, the sea parted enough for Moses to lead his people across to safety. But when the Egyptian army attempted to follow the same route and pursue them, the waters returned and the sea swallowed them up.

God's Command to Commemorate the Coming out of Bondage

3 And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place; no leavened bread shall be eaten. 4 This day you are to go forth, in the month of Abib. 5 And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites.... which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. 6 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. 7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. 8 And you shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' 9 And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. 10 You shall therefore keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.

(Exodus 13: 3-10)

The Paschal Lamb

It is from this command of the Lord that the Passover festival was initiated. The one week of Passover commemorating the liberation of the Hebrew people from Egyptian bondage over 3,000 years ago, is kept even to this day by the Jewish people. It must be understood that the significance of the Seder meal is that the Jewish people should come to see themselves as though they had even today personally left Egypt. But which Egypt? There are many kinds of Egypts; material, psychological and spiritual, and ultimately the Jew, seeking higher consciousness, must break out of all of them. It is the inner freedom from desire, anger and so on, all of which keep not only the Jew, but all human beings from truly interacting with God.

And of course, in Jesus' time as well, the Passover was of extreme importance. People from all over the Empire made pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. It was one of the most crowded times in the whole year. People would go to Jerusalem, probably a week beforehand, to make sure that everybody would be in a state of purity. It just meant that while impure, you could not enter a holy part of the Temple (see Note) and offer the Paschal lamb for sacrifice in the Temple. So pilgrims frequently went a week before Passover so that they could undergo certain rituals of purification, and take part in the slaughter of the Paschal lambs that happens the night before Passover begins as God mandated it when he spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. We can see something of this in the Gospel writings. Jesus enters with the flock of pilgrims going into Jerusalem the week before Passover. This is the triumphal entry described in the Gospel (Matt:21:1-11). And he reaches the Temple during the week before Passover. Soon for Jesus, his Passion (see Note) will begin and the image of Jesus being the Paschal Lamb will be made very clear.

The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE, so that its function as a place for ritual and ritual sacrifice was also eliminated from Jewish religious life. Therefore, the commandment to commemorate the coming out of bondage, Passover, is presently kept at the synagogue and, most importantly, at the home of every observing Jew around the world, which includes the holding of the Seder, or the feast of the Passover. It is this Seder at which Jesus gathered his disciples that became to be known in Christianity as the Last Supper (see Note).

The Covenant between God and the Israelites

But let us continue the story of Moses. The Hebrew slaves achieved freedom not as an end in itself, but to serve God. That is why Moses said to Pharaoh,

"Let my people go that they may worship Me".

(Exodus 7:16)

And that is also why, in the Jewish tradition, the culmination of Exodus is the giving of the Torah, an event which may be considered as the revelation at Mount Sinai. Seven weeks after they leave Egypt, the Hebrews reach Sinai. There God, for the first and only time, speaks to the entire Hebrew people, and declares before them the Ten Commandments. However, in the days immediately preceding God's revelation of the Ten Commandments, He has told Moses to prepare the Hebrew people for a ceremony that will formalize their relationship to Him. God also makes it known that the relationship comes with a condition.

"If you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. ..you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. ..."

(Exodus 19:5-6)

The basic overview of Israel's obligations under the covenant is presented in Exodus 20-23. In brief, these chapters outline the Law, which is against idolatry, murder, theft, and the mistreatment of strangers, widows, orphans, and the poor. Additional laws command the observance of the Sabbath, the Sabbatical year (during which the land must lie fallow), and such feasts as Passover. Moses relays God's message to the Israelite elders, and the whole nation answers collectively.

"All that the Lord has spoken we will do".

(Exodus 19:8).

That is, a band of escaped slaves standing at the foot of Mount Sinai and pledging to God to fulfill the commandments of the Torah became a people, and, with time, came to understand the mission that came with this pledge.

God Gives the Ten Commandments to His Chosen People

Moses then leads the Israelites to the foot of Mount Sinai, where God announces the Ten Commandments.

First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

Second Commandment: You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 9 you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 10 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Third Commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Fourth Commandment: Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; 14 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your manservant, or your maidservant, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. 15 You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Fifth Commandment: Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you; that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you, in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

Sixth Commandment: You shall not kill.

Seventh Commandment: Neither shall you commit adultery.

Eighth Commandment: Neither shall you steal.

Ninth Commandment: Neither shall you bear false witness

against your neighbour.

Tenth Commandment: Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's.

(Deuteronomy. 5:6-21)

Certainly, these Ten Commandments form the backbone of Jewish and Christian ethical monotheism, but one should not forget that they are only a part of the many Laws of the Torah. Furthermore, obedience to the Torah is the pledge the Hebrew people gave to God, Who, in return, will "treasure" them.

The Law that Moses faithfully transmits to the Jews in the Torah embraces far more than the Ten Commandments. In addition to the ritual regulations that applied exclusively to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews are instructed to love God as well as be in awe of Him, to love their neighbours as themselves, and to love the stranger, that is, the non-Jew living among them as themselves as well. And most important, the Torah is considered a direct revelation from God, which is why these Five Books of Moses have had a unique position among all holy books of the Jewish people and a unique authority in the Jewish world for three thousand years. What the Jews have presented to the world through their sacred books has not been Moses or any individual, but rather their ethical ideas about interactions between the One God and man, and the interactions between each other. It is interesting to note that at the prayers said at the Passover, the name of Moses is mentioned only once. And despite the extraordinary veneration accorded Moses – "there has not arisen a prophet since like Moses" is the Bible's verdict (Deuteronomy 34:10) – no Jewish thinker ever thought he was anything other than a man.

That is to say, the freeing from Egyptian bondage, the giving of the Torah, and the covenant is due to the Power, Authority and Love of the One God.

In fact, Moses in Deuteronomy makes clear God's command to learn and obey the Torah; that is The Law God gave to the Hebrew nation.

20 "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordi-

nances which the Lord our God has commanded you?' 21 then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 22 and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes; 23 and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land which he swore to give to our fathers. 24 And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day. 25 And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us."

(Deuteronomy 20-25)

The Death of Moses

The Torah's last twelve verses record Moses' death.

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, 2 all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, 3 the Negeb, and the Plain – that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees – as far as Zoar. 4 The Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there." 5 Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. 6 He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. 7 Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated. 8 The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. 9 Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses. 10 Never

since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. 11 He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, 12 and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

(Deuteronomy. 34:1-12)

It may be considered that no man should know the grave of Moses so as to prevent worship there or attach any value to his mortal body. Having seen Egypt, Moses knew how prone men are to such beliefs. Instead, he, as God's messenger, helped to create an enduring image of humanity that loved and obeyed the One God, Who, in turn, would cherish the humanity He created.

Moses left his people, not being allowed to enter the promised land. Being human and imperfect, Moses had offended God at one point (Deuteronomy 32:51). All that he was allowed was to go up on a mountain to see The Promised Land before he died. The Jews have been so faithful to their vow to God, that they have never worshipped him. What the Jews have presented to the world has not been Moses or any individual, but their collective ideas about God and man. That Moses has never been deified is one of the most significant facts about the ideas of God and man in the Old Testament.

Even in death, Moses chose to serve God and the Jewish people true to the letter and spirit of the Law.

The Scriptures that Jesus Knew

By Jesus' time, the sacred books of the Hebrew people formed the basis of what he apparently knew. The synagogue service on the Sabbath would consist of communal study of various collections from these books. Jesus in his teaching referred frequently to the Law of Moses, by which is meant the five books of the Torah. In addition, he often refers frequently to the prophecies of Isaiah (see Note) or passages from the Psalms (see Note). These are the most widely quoted passages of the Old Testament in the New Testament. Whatever it was that Jesus spoke, he was speaking words of his own, he was speaking words of common wisdom, or he was referring to

or explicating verses specifically from the five books of Moses, from the Torah, or more especially the prophet Isaiah or the book of the Psalms. These will have been the stuff out of which Jesus will have created his teaching and his preaching, that is, what was to become the Old Testament. And it is only some 100 years after the Crucifixion that we begin to have the creation of the New Testament (see Note).

The Golden Rule

Most Christians, and many Jews, believe that the Golden Rule was first formulated by Jesus, not realizing that when the founder of Christianity preached, "Love your neighbour," he was simply quoting the revelation to Moses... the Torah.

"Love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord".

(Leviticus 19:18)

The last words in the verse, "*I am the Lord*," usually are passed over as being irrelevant to the commandment. In Jewish thought, however, the rationale for loving our neighbours is precisely because God, who created all of us in His image, demands it. Judaism sees ethics as ultimately dependent on a source above humanity, on God. Without God, morality is reduced to a matter of opinion. In his ministry, Jesus would make this connection even stronger.

In the first century before CE, more than a thousand years after the Torah was given, a would-be convert asked Hillel, the greatest rabbi of his age, to summarize Judaism briefly (literally, "while standing on one foot"). Hillel responded with a negative, and perhaps more pragmatic, version of the biblical verse: "What is hateful unto you, do not do unto your neighbour. The rest is commentary; now go and study" Rabbi Akiva who lived in the beginning of the second century CE, said that the most fundamental law of Judaism was: "What is hateful unto you, do not do unto your neighbour."

God's Love Shown in the Old Testament

In The Old Testament, God often speaks of His love and the love we should have for each other. Even though the Israelites often did wrong, God continued to love them (and all of humanity).

6.The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7. maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

(Exodus 34:6-7)

Jesus demands that we love our neighbours because that commandment was part of his Jewish background.

Furthermore, there are many instances in the Old Testament where God showed His love. Since space is limited, only some chapter and verses from the Torah and the Psalms can be presented here. But let these be enough to show that a loving God was the God that Jesus knew.

Rather than considering the God of the Old Testament as being vindictive, let us consider the following passage from Proverbs of the Old Testament.

11 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, 12 for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

(Proverbs 3: 11-12)

Here are words of Moses to God or about God

2 The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him....

(Exodus 15:2)

6 The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

(Exodus 34:6)

Let us read some of the Psalms, which are found only in the Old Testament:

6I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.."

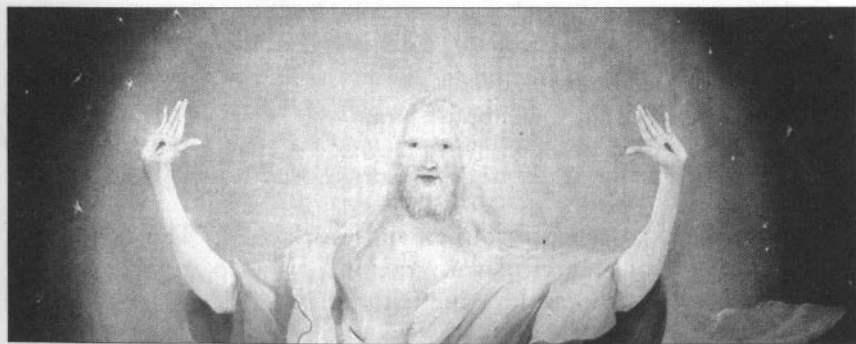
(Psalm 13:6)

Here is one verse from Psalm 145:

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

(Psalm 145:8-9)

As is noted in this essay, obeying the commandments of the Torah made great daily demands on the Hebrew people. In order for Jesus' message of salvation to be spread throughout the Roman world, Paul and the early members of the Christian church addressed both Jews and gentiles. Paul insisted that God in His mercy replaced obeying the commandments of the Torah with faith in the sacrifice of Jesus to remove the sins of humanity. This was very successful and the Roman world was Christianised. While some Jews did accept Jesus as the Messiah, most Jews would not surrender their faith in God who gave them the Torah, nor break the covenants made between them and God by Abraham and Moses. Thus, by 400 CE a new religion, Christianity, formed and the religion from which it was formed, Judaism, was cast off almost completely.



Notes

— The Annunciation (See also the Holy Spirit)

According to the Gospel of Luke, 1:26 ff, the archangel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth in Galilee, to the Virgin Mary, and announced to her that she had found favour with God and would bear a son, Jesus. She asked how that would be, since she was pledged to be married to Joseph, she was pledged to remain a virgin until then. The angel replied that she would conceive through the Holy Spirit. Mary consented, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it happen unto me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

— Baptism (See also Original Sin)

It is the rite of admission into the Christian church of all sects. In the Gospels, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist "for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4). In the rite of baptism, water is poured or sprinkled on the head of an infant or a newly converted Christian. Some sects immerse the whole body of the faithful in a river, ocean or lake. Jesus does not seem to do or speak about baptism during his ministry. However, after the Resurrection, he instructs:

19 *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."*

(Matt 28:19-20)

— The Bible

Basically the Bible consists of the sacred writings of the Jews (The Old Testament) and those of the Christians (The New Testament). For Christianity, much of the Old Testament is considered relevant, particularly the chapter and verses that are thought to be prophecies of the coming of Jesus and his mission on earth, and the story of Creation (Genesis) and giving of the Torah, which contained the Law, especially the Ten Commandments. When Jesus spoke, he was speaking words of his own, he was speaking words of common wisdom, or he was referring to or explaining verses from the Hebrew Bible, that is, The Old Testament. Specifically, he referred to the five books of Moses, to the Torah, or the book of the Psalms. Along with his own original teachings, these will have been the stuff out of which Jesus created much of his teaching and his preaching.

Since the story of Jesus is told entirely in The New Testament of the Bible, it is very important that we understand that book. Of course, at the time of Jesus' ministry, there was only The Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible. Although the New Testament's history is very complex and is not entirely clear, it seems to have been written and formed by 200 CE. The division into the OT/NT as it is known today dates from the 4th century CE.

According to Jewish tradition, what the Christians came to call The Old Testament was given by God. The first five books are called The Torah by the Jews. The Torah is divided into five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Each book is then further divided into chapter and verse. This organisation of book-chapter-verse was continued and carried over to the writing of the New Testament as we find it today. References to the Bible in this essay has been made according to this organization.

Genesis, the first book, tells the story of the Creation of the Universe and the World, including the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (see note on The Fall), as well as God's revealing himself to humanity. For the Jews, the most important portions of the Torah are the laws that God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. These laws are the backbone of the morality and ethics of Western Civilization. The Torah, in Exodus, includes the Ten Commandments. God commanded that his laws be kept, and it is by these laws that the Orthodox Jew still strictly guides his life today. To put it another way, during the lifetime of a deeply believing Jew, his/her duty to God is to keep the laws of the Torah. Furthermore, in order to keep God's law,

it is necessary to study the law so that each one is understood. As the circumstances of time and place change throughout history, the laws of the Torah, which were written for desert tribes perhaps about 1200 BCE have to be applied to each current situation as it comes up in the life of Jewish society. In order to record all of these changes, a process of commentary on the Torah has been going on for over 3,000 years. These commentaries were codified separately and are called the Mishna and Talmud. These are also revered and studied by Orthodox Jews.

One of the laws of the Torah further declares,

...when all Israel comes
to be seen at the presence of YHWH your God
at the place that he chooses, (= the synagogue)
you are to proclaim this Instruction (= The Torah)
in front of all Israel, in their ears. (= Read the Torah aloud)
Deuteronomy 31:11

This is true even today. Throughout the year in the synagogue, the Torah is divided into 54 sections and read in a loud clear voice in front of the congregation. When the reading of the entire Torah is finished, there is joyous celebration by the congregation* and the cycle begins again.

Both the Torah and commentaries such as the Talmud were part of the holy texts that existed throughout Jewish history even before Jesus' time. However, the present terms Bible and Old/New Testament are Christian. The traditional Hebrew name, Tanach, is used by the Jews for all the books of The Old Testament.

Jesus being Jewish, regularly worshipped in Jewish communal worship at a synagogue. He read and preached from the Jewish sacred texts, that is, from the Torah, and other sacred writings. But it is the Torah in particular that is of the greatest importance to the mission of Jesus. In the Gospels, as in the quote just below, he refers to it as the Law.

"Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For

* congregation: a group of people regularly attending worship in a church, mosque or synagogue.

truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

(Matt. 5:17-18)

— The Covenant

The founding fathers of Judaism are Abraham, his son, Isaac and his son, Jacob. In Genesis, God reveals himself to Abraham and commands him:

Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation.

(Genesis 12:1,2)

Before the covenant of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, God makes an earlier covenant: The ritual of circumcision performed even today on the eighth day after birth to all male infants by the Jewish people, is this covenant. God commands Abraham:

"...you and your offspring throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring. ...every male among you shall be circumcised. ...and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you"

(Genesis 17: 9-11).

The covenant is understood as a two-way relationship: Abraham and his descendants are to keep faith only in God and no other gods, and He is to watch over them. Thus was the monotheism of Judaism, Christianity and Islam said to have been created.

The Three, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the Patriarchs of Judaism, the religion from which Jesus springs. For Jews even today, the Patriarchs are remembered in prayer three times a day: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob."

— Crucifixion

Crucifixion was a common method of execution used by the Romans to punish slaves and foreigners. Hung from a crossbar fixed to an upright peg, the naked victim was hung as a public spectacle until dead. No vital organs were damaged, and death was slow agony. Prior to crucifixion, the victim was scourged and made to carry the

crossbar to the execution site. The crucifixion of Jesus followed this order of events after the pronouncement of sentence. The leader of the four-man execution squad led the procession bearing a sign detailing the reason for the execution. The victim's outstretched arms were affixed to the cross-bar by either nails or ropes. This was then raised and secured to the perpendicular pole (which in some areas may have been left in place permanently, both for convenience and as a warning). A small board or peg may have been provided as sort of a seat to bear some of the weight of the condemned. This only prolonged the agony of the victim. The conventional misconception is that the spikes were driven through the hands. The Romans had discovered much earlier that the skin would just tear away and the person would fall from the cross. So the spikes were certainly driven through the wrist area, between the bones there.

The feet were then secured in a manner forcing the knees into a bent position. Contrary to popular paintings and other representations of the Crucifixion, crosses were not high; the feet were probably only a few inches above the ground. The sign describing the accusation was secured to the cross. Death occurred through both suffocation and exposure.

— Easter

This is the holiest of Christian holy days. It celebrates the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. So-called Good Friday is the day of the Crucifixion, while Easter Sunday immediately follows and celebrates the Resurrection. In very early Christianity, this holiday coincided with the Jewish Passover, but Christianity soon disassociated itself from the Jewish calendar. Presently, the date of Easter is determined by a lunar calculation, which makes it occur in late March or early April.

— The Eucharist (see also *The Last Supper*)

The final meal of Jesus with his disciples before his death. In the three Synoptic Gospels, the Last Supper is described as a Passover meal. At this meal, Jesus takes bread and wine as his body and blood and later directed that the meal be repeated in memory of his coming sacrifice.

15 And he said to them, *"I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you I shall not eat*

it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "*Take this, and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."* 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "*This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* 20 And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "*This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*"

(Luke 22: 15-20)

The celebration of the Eucharist was accordingly regarded as an essential part of worship in the early church and has remained a central observance of the Christian church ever since. For example, the Mass, with the Eucharist is performed daily by priests of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the belief of the Roman Catholic Church, the bread of the Mass becomes the actual body of Jesus, while the wine becomes the actual blood of the Saviour. The priest after his training is ordained, upon which he has the mystical power to bring about this transubstantiation – the transformation of the wine and bread of the Mass to the actual blood and body of Jesus, the Saviour. Thus, during the Mass, Jesus is actually, physically present as is believed by the Roman Catholic faithful.

— **The Fall:** see **Original Sin**

— **Hebrews or Israelites**

In the Old Testament, the term 'Jewish' is not used. Rather, Hebrew or Israelite is used when referring to what are today called Jews.

— **Holy Spirit**

In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is God. The Christians believe in a mystery called the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. There are three persons in one God. Humans cannot understand this nature of God, but must simply accept it on faith. It is the Holy Spirit that conceived Jesus in the womb of Mary at the Annunciation.

— **The Last Supper:** see also **The Eucharist**

The meal shared by Jesus and his disciples on the eve of his Passion at which he instituted the Holy Eucharist. The Last Supper has been immortalized by the famous painting of Leonardo da Vinci. In the painting, we see the Disciples sitting at a table with Jesus in the centre. And perhaps this is the image that the world generally has of this gathering.

Jesus being Jewish, kept Passover both as a child and an adult as can be seen by several references in the Gospels, which make it clear that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. The actuality of Jewish custom whereby the entire family celebrates together contradicts da Vinci's painting.

(a) **Passover seder:** The celebration or seder, which involves the sharing of a full meal, was held whilst reclining together around a low table in fellowship. Reclining is a mark of a freeman at a great feast. Indeed, even today, when the Jewish child asks the traditional questions at the Passover seder, one of them is "Why do we recline and not sit on this night?". If, as it seems, the Last Supper was a Passover meal then it is very unlikely to have looked anything like medieval paintings since they would not have been seated around a table. Another surprise to Christians is that wives and children may well have been there too, not just male disciples, since it is inconceivable that the wives and children were at home celebrating alone without the men. Passover is a feast that celebrates redemption of whole households and a nation, not individuals. This would of course have depended upon how many of Jesus' disciples' families had come to Jerusalem for the festival.

(b) **(un)leavened bread:** The bread of Europe and America is made with yeast which is a leavening agent that makes the bread become full of gas so that it swells and rises. This natural process takes several hours. In comparison, the chapatti of India uses no leavening, so it is one kind of flat, unleavened bread. When the Jewish people had to flee from Egypt, they had no time to make their bread with leavening, so to commemorate this fact, even today at the time of Passover, the Jewish people will absolutely refuse to eat anything but an unleavened bread, called *matzo*. During the flight from Egypt, God commanded the Jewish people to eat only unleavened bread. And thereafter to commemorate the flight into freedom, every orthodox Jewish family must eat only *matzo* for seven days. This unleavened bread represents the readiness to leap into freedom

and away from slavery. With this in mind, it is the strict duty of the Jewish family to clean all leavening from the house just before the one week Passover celebration begins. This is a custom that is well over 3000 years old, and of course, at the Last Supper, a Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples ate only unleavened bread. It is this unleavened bread which became the bread of the Eucharist.

—Messiah or Christ

Christ is a Greek word and means Messiah. It was applied to Jesus even in the New Testament to show the faith of the early Christians in the unique meaning of his death and subsequent resurrection. That is, Jesus was the Messiah; he was Jesus Christ.

The Jewish belief that the coming of the Messiah still lies in the future is one of the major differences between the faith of Jews and Christians. The Christians believe that the Messiah came 2000 years ago in the person of Jesus. Although faith in the Messiah had been entirely Jewish, and still is to this day, the Christians claimed Jesus as the Messiah (Jesus Christ), but gave an entirely different meaning and belief to this word.

(a) **Jewish:** The rabbis taught that with the coming of the messiah, the anointed descendant of the great King David of the Old Testament, the climax of human history would be achieved and God's kingdom would be established here on Earth. Messianic speculation on when would the Messiah appear in humanity's midst thus became a constant feature of Jewish culture. Although presently, this belief is not universal throughout Judaism, the Orthodox still maintain that a Messiah, a descendant from King David, will come and reign in Jerusalem.

It is important here to note that in the Jewish belief, there is no mention of heaven, hell or even of an afterlife. God's Kingdom reigned over by the Messiah will be established here on Earth.

(b) **Christian:** Christianity insists that Jesus is the anointed* descendant of King David. Through this and other signs from prophets of the Old Testament, Christianity declares Jesus to be the Messiah. In Greek, the word 'messiah' is 'christ' or the anointed one, so according to the faith of Christianity, Jesus becomes Jesus Christ. In the Gospels, Jesus refers to himself as 'the son of man' which is not a supernatural figure such as a messiah. Yet, Christianity claims

* anoint: to apply oil to as a sign of holiness in a sacred rite (ceremony).

that through the miraculous deeds and teachings of his public ministry, he demonstrated the power of God to change life through himself. The basic Christian dogma that God manifested Himself in the flesh as Jesus who then carried the burden of humanity's sins and thus redeemed humanity by the Crucifixion is finally officially expressed in the 4th century in the Nicene Creed. Thus Jesus Christ is the Saviour of humanity. Such an interpretation of 'messiah' remains unacceptable to both Judaism and Islam.

(c) **Nicene Creed:** In 325 CE, the Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicea to decide and establish the nature of Christ and his mission to humanity. From the earliest times after the Crucifixion, its meaning and the nature of Jesus as the Christ were disputed vigorously among the early Christians. In trying to establish itself, the early Church had to present itself with a single creed or there would be several churches, each claiming to know both Christ's true nature and the way to salvation (see below) that he promised. The Nicene Creed was established by this famous Council and has become the foundation statement of faith of all Christian sects up to today. In fact, in modern times, it has been proposed as a basis for Christian unity.

Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father: Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father: He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son). With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one

baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

— Original Sin or The Fall; Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

The concept of Original Sin is essential to Christian theology. Without belief in Original Sin there would be no need for crucifixion, salvation or atonement to take place. In the Garden of Eden (Paradise), where the Creation took place, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil. In spite of God's commandment, they ate the fruit, thus becoming aware of good vs. evil. This disobedience of Adam and Eve against God's command is the Fall. According to Christianity, it was such a great sin that it created a permanent state of separation that has been passed down from Adam and Eve to all their descendants, that is, humanity. Because Jesus was crucified, the Cross has assumed the central significance for Christians. It symbolizes reconciliation with God through faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:18-25), whose life, death, and Resurrection are proof of God's forgiveness of human sin, that is, the Original Sin of Adam.

This Original Sin is 'washed' away by Baptism (see Note). After baptism, Salvation, through Jesus' sacrifice of the crucifixion takes effect, and the baptized person enters the Christian church of the saved.

Passover (See also Appendix: Moses and above, Last Supper)

Even to this day, one of the most important celebrations in the Judaic religious calendar is Passover. It basically commemorates the Exodus or the release of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt.

Moses then leads the former slaves into the desert of Sinai. Shortly after the escape from Egypt, he receives the Torah, the Law, which includes the Ten Commandments directly from God, by which God makes a covenant between Himself and His chosen people, which is still today one of the foundations of the Jewish faith.

— Pharisees

From about 500 BCE, the Jewish people were often forced out of Palestine and made to settle throughout the Middle East. These scattered settlements away from the Promised Land and Jerusalem was called the Diaspora. The commandments of the Torah insisted on

many customs and rites that only the Jewish people followed. For example there was circumcision, dietary laws, never worshipping idols and so on. Intermarriage with gentiles was strictly forbidden. These customs and rituals were carried to the Diaspora and practiced in Jewish settlements there. By 300 BCE, the culture of the Middle East was Greek and idolatrous*. While some Jews were influenced by Hellenistic culture and were assimilated and their Jewishness was lost or changed, many Jews reacted to the threat of assimilation by becoming fervently devoted to the Mosaic Law and living very religious lives. From this reaction, there developed a sect of Judaism. These orthodox Jews were called Pharisees, meaning those who separated themselves from the gentiles, and from the Hellenising forces and tendencies which constantly faced and threatened Judaism in the Diaspora.

By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had become the strictest defenders of the Jewish religion and the Law. But while Jesus wished not to abolish the Law, he ardently sought the Jews to follow it with a consciousness deeper than merely the letter of the Law. In many passages of the Gospels, Christ strongly warns the multitude against the Pharisees.

23 1 Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 *"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.*

(Matt 23: 1-3)

Jesus is saying that the Pharisees understand only the letter of the Law and not its spirit. So in the Gospels, the Pharisees are presented very negatively. However, in spite of Jesus' strong warnings and attacks on the Pharisees in the New Testament, the Pharisees historically have played the chief role in preserving the Jewish people over the 2000 years after the Romans scattered the Jewish nation into the Diaspora after 70 CE. While always waiting and praying for the time that the Jewish nation could return to the Promised Land (now Israel), the Pharisees became the rabbis of the scattered Jewish communities and taught that it was the duty of all true Jews to give whole-hearted devotion to the Law, as well as to keeping the many

* idolatrous: worship of a physical object, e.g. a statue, taken as a god.

Jewish observances at both the home and the synagogue.

— Pontius Pilate

Although it is only found in Matthew, the scene of Pontius Pilate washing his hands of the guilt of the wrongful condemning of Jesus, whom he feels innocent, is a famous part of the Passion story. Some historians believe that in order to maintain good relations with their Roman rulers, the early Christians when writing the Gospels, chose to not blame the Romans for the death of Jesus, but rather the Jews. Since there is no other historical source of these events but the New Testament, the point has become controversial in modern times. On the other hand, laying the blame on the Jews for Jesus' crucifixion in the Gospels became a major cause of the terrible anti-Semitism suffered by the Jewish people throughout European history.

— Sabbath

The seventh day of the week, on which observing Christians and Jews, even to this day, abstain from all work. According to Genesis of the Old Testament

1:31. Now God saw all that he had made, and behold, It was exceedingly good! There was setting, there was dawning: the sixth day. 2:1. Thus were finished the heavens and the earth, with all of their array. 2:2. God had finished, on the seventh day, his work that he had made, and then he ceased, on the seventh day, from all his work that he had made. 2:3. God gave the seventh day his blessing, and he made it holy, for on it he ceased from all his work, that by creating, God had made.

(Genesis 1:31; 2:1-3)

When God gave the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people through Moses, he included the Third Commandment

20:8. *Remember the Sabbath, to hallow it. 9. For six days you are to serve and are to make all your work, 10. but the seventh day is Sabbath for thy Lord, God: you are not to make any kind of work...*

(Exodus 20 : 8-10)

The early Christians were mostly Jews and at first maintained many Jewish practices of worship, including the Sabbath. But as more and more gentiles converted to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the importance of the Jewish Sabbath became less and less. By the fourth century CE, the church service of the Last Supper (the Eucharist) was held on Sunday mornings and Jewish Sabbath observances disappeared from Christianity.

— Salvation

In Christianity, the basic meaning is that the human soul is reconciled with God through the death of Jesus Christ. The human is saved from sins committed during a lifetime, as well as from the Original Sin. Baptism saves the soul of an infant or a new church member by washing away the Original Sin, and so avoids damnation or being sent to Hell for eternity. That is, upon dying the human soul is judged by God to either be saved or damned – to be in heaven or hell for eternity. This judgement is brought about in several ways: a) By dying on the cross, Jesus as God in human form atoned for the sins of humanity, including the Original Sin. b) To be saved, one must have faith in the sacrifice of the Crucifixion. That is, one cannot obtain salvation by good works alone. Faith in the sacrifice by Jesus as Christ is also essential. c) to endeavour throughout life to remain sinless.

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

(Mark 16:16)

— Satan

According to Christianity, the devil is the opponent of the Kingdom of God and deceiver of humans, leading those weak in faith to a sinful life. The result is the soul of a sinner having to spend all of eternity in Hell, a place of great suffering. This conflict between God and Satan to capture the souls of humans is a strong Christian belief. Satan is presented as an angel that disobeyed God, was cast out, and chose to be the enemy of God and man. In the New Testament, Satan is portrayed as an evil, rebellious demon who is the enemy of God and mankind.

— Seven Last Words on the Cross

Not all seven sayings can be found in any one account of Jesus' crucifixion. The sayings are a harmonizing of texts from each of the four canonical gospels. In the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus shouts the fourth phrase only, and cries out wordlessly before dying. In Luke's Gospel, the first, second and seventh sayings occur. The third, fifth and sixth sayings can only be found in John's Gospel.

1. *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).
2. *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise* (Luke 23:43).
3. *Woman, behold your son: behold your mother* (John 19:26 f.).
4. *Eli Eli lema sabachthani?* (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34).
5. *I thirst* (John 19:28).
6. *It is finished* (John 19:30).
7. *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit* (Luke 23:46).

— The Temple and Ark of the Covenant

The Temple in Jerusalem was the central place of Jewish worship in ancient times, and included animal sacrifice. It was primarily built to house the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was a cabinet that contained the original tablets on which the Torah was inscribed. The tablets have been lost to history. There were two temples in Jewish history. The first was built by King Solomon, but was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BCE. The second Temple, which was that which Jesus knew, was built and finished in the first century BCE. However, The Temple was destroyed permanently in 70 CE by the Romans after a revolt by the Hebrews against Roman rule.

A remnant of the Second Temple remains in Jerusalem and is known as the "Western Wall". It is believed to have been part of the enclosure of the sacred precincts of the Second Temple.

*
* *

GLOSSARY

Many words have two or more meanings. The meaning given here is the meaning in the context of the text.

abide: to always dwell in a place or in one's heart/mind.

alms: money or goods given to the poor or needy.

anoint: to apply oil to as a sign of holiness in a sacred rite (ceremony).

Apostles: the twelve followers (disciples) of Jesus during his ministry.

atone: the reunion of man and God by the life, and the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus.

blasphemy: an act or words which insult God or a holy place.

bushel: a measure of about eight gallons often in the shape of a basket used by farmers.

canon(ical): the officially accepted holy writings or scriptures: the canonical Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

cast lots: to gamble for money, and so on by choosing straws, etc.

CE: Common Era: used by non-Christians or secular persons instead of the Christian AD (in the year of our Lord).

census: (in ancient Rome) a registration of the population and property evaluation for purposes of taxation. For this reason, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem.

circumcision: cutting off the foreskin of the penis as demanded by God of all Jewish and Muslim males. Although not practiced by Christians, the circumcision of the infant Jesus is celebrated in January in the Church calendar.

conception: under normal circumstances, the making of a new human being by the fertilizing of the egg (ovum) by a sperm, and implantation of the fertilized egg in the womb, where it will grow until birth.

congregation: a group of people regularly attending worship in a church, mosque or synagogue.

covet: to wish, or crave for something, esp. the property of another person.

creed: an official or widely accepted statement or system of beliefs of a religion.

cubit: an ancient measure of length.

denarii: the money of the time of Jesus.

devout: a very religious person who observes his religious practices very carefully.

- diaspora:** Jewish settlements or Jewish people living outside of Palestine.
- disciple:** a personal follower of Jesus (including his twelve Apostles) during his earthly life.
- dogma:** a religious or political doctrine(s) accepted as true without proof or explanation.
- fast:** to not eat all or certain foods or meals, esp. as a religious observance.
- fallow:** to leave land unseeded after being ploughed and harrowed to regain fertility for a crop.
- gentile:** non-Jewish person (see also heathen).
- grace:** the divine assistance and power given to man by God.
- harlot:** a prostitute.
- hallowed:** some thing, place or words taken to be sacred or holy.
- heathen:** a people or nation that does not recognize the God of the Bible or Quran.
- heretical (heresy):** unorthodox opinions or dogma strongly unacceptable by a religion.
- hewn:** wood or stone cut or shaped by being struck powerfully.
- hyssop:** a Biblical plant, used for sprinkling in the ritual practices of the Hebrews.
- iota:** very small amount.
- idolatrous:** worship of a physical object, e.g. a statue, taken as a god.
- immaculate:** morally pure; free from sin or spiritual corruption.
- leaven:** an ingredient like yeast or baking powder that causes dough, etc. to fill with bubbles of gas and thus lightens the resulting bread or cake. See: unleavened bread.
- liable:** legally obliged and so responsible for the results of one's acts.
- Mammon:** riches and greed in the form of a false god and regarded as a source of evil and corruption.
- manger:** a box in a stable, barn, etc., from which horses or cattle feed.
- manifestation:** the actual demonstration or appearance of an idea, principle or teaching that makes it clear.
- member:** a part of the body such as an arm or leg.
- ministry:** various acts and deeds to promote one's religion, such as teaching.
- missionary:** a religious person who travels to and lives with non-believers and tries to convert them to his/her religion, for example, Christian or Islamic missionaries.
- ostentation:** using one's wealth in a showy way for all to see.
- pastoral:** simple country life; relating to shepherds, their work and way of life.

- plague:** a disease that quickly spreads to many of the people of a region.
- plight:** a condition of extreme hardship or danger.
- pogrom:** an organized attack, often murderous, against a Jewish population.
- prodigal:** wasteful, uncontrolled spending.
- rabbi:** a Jew trained for professional religious leadership of a Jewish congregation.
- ravenous:** ferocious and greedy.
- redeem:** (by Jesus as Saviour or Redeemer) to free (men) from sin by his death on the Cross.
- reverence:** spiritually respecting God or what is holy.
- scathing:** severe criticism.
- scourge:** to whip severely.
- scriptures:** specific writings regarded as sacred by a religious group, e.g. Holy Bible.
- self-righteous:** someone convinced that only he is right while intolerant of other views.
- squander:** to spend money wastefully.
- staff:** a stick with some special use such as for walking or to show authority.
- succinct(ly):** short, accurate statement(s) or explanation that is clear and to the point.
- swear:** to call on God to witness your promise.
- synagogue:** the place of worship and gathering of a Jewish congregation.
- tithe:** A tenth part of produce, personal income, or profits, contributed for the support of the church.
- thy:** an old-fashioned word meaning 'your'; belonging to or associated in some way with 'you'.
- trespasses:** an old fashioned word meaning sins or crimes.
- unleavened bread:** See leaven and Notes.

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Other titles
in the *Illumination, Heroism and Harmony* Series

Parvati's Tapasya
Nala and Damayanti
The Siege of Troy
Alexander the Great
Homer and the Iliad — Sri Aurobindo and Ilion
Catherine the Great
Uniting Men — Jean Monnet
Gods and the World
Joan of Arc

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Illumination, harmony and heroism are three major powers that can uplift life to higher and higher levels. All three are manifested in the New Testament's account of the life, ministry and crucifixion of Jesus. While the Gospels tell little of the childhood of Jesus, we can understand how illuminated he was from the incident when at the age of twelve he was found in a synagogue discussing Jewish Mosaic Law with the elders of the synagogue.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus brings forth the message of having love, not only for God, but a deep, uncompromising love of humans for each other. This insistence of Jesus on harmony between humans is clearly expressed when he adds another commandment to the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would have them do to you." Jesus further admonishes us to "turn the other cheek".

His "Love" illuminates us, asking humanity to go far beyond the egoistic love for one's family, friends or country. This "Love" that Jesus taught so firmly during his ministry was given the Greek name, "agape" in the early years of Christianity. It is through agape that true harmony could be created through human unity. Humanity has been told this, but has yet to truly believe him who came to give us this message.

Jesus's incredible heroism is shown to us clearly through his resolve to complete his mission. He undergoes crucifixion with great calmness. And even while undergoing the excruciating pain of the crucifixion, he still asks, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Can we imagine any greater love?

