Jesus and His People's Traditions

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Jesus and His People’s Tradition

The Second Vatican Council has stressed Jesus’ roots in Israel. This is not a new truth, but there is a great deal of difference between a truth vaguely recognized and a truth known in detail and gladly acknowledged. It is to the latter purpose that this essay wishes to make some contribution.

I

The Gospel according to Luke records that, at the age of twelve, Jesus accompanied His parents from Nazareth to Jerusalem where they were to celebrate the Passover (Lk 2:41-52). The evangelist remarks that Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem every year, “as usual.” Jesus was not yet thirteen years old; He was not yet, as we would say today, Bar Mitzvah, “son of commandment,” one bound to keep the Law. This minimum age did not apply to the pilgrimages prescribed for the three great feasts of the year, Pesach, Shabuoth, and Sukkoth. According to the Mishnah, the handicapped—that is, the lame, the blind, the deaf—were dispensed from attending the feast, and so was the minor. In the opinion of the rigorous school of Shammai, a minor was one unable to ascend the Temple mount on his father’s shoulders; in the opinion of the more liberal school of Hillel, a minor was one

1. Kata to ethos. The allusion is to the commandments in Exodus 23:17; 34:23; and particularly in Deuteronomy 16:16. Ethos, “custom,” in the New Testament often means as much as “law” (Ac 6:14; 26:3; 28:17). These ordinances demand three annual pilgrimages, at the feasts of Pesach (Passover), Shabuoth (Pentecost), and Sukkoth (Tabernacles). But it seems, according to Luke 2:41; that, as a rule, people only went once a year, at the Passover. (See J. Schmid, Das Evangelium nach Lukas [3rd ed., Regensburg, 1955] p. 80.) No doubt, it was considered most important to take the children along at the Passover because this feast was to be celebrated within the family circle (see Ex 12:3).

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who was unable to hold his father’s hand while going up the Temple mount (Hag. 2a). It seems, then, that children were taken along at a fairly early age, and there is no reason to assume, as is often done, that Jesus’ pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the age of twelve was His first.

As the party from Nazareth started for home, the twelve-year-old Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not notice His absence till the end of the first day of travel; only two days later did they find Him in Jerusalem, in no less a place than the Temple. “He sat surrounded by the teachers listening to them and putting questions” (Lk 2:46). Jesus had mingled with the disciples of the rabbis. Later, He Himself would appear in the Temple as teacher. At that moment, however, He was wholly the learner, although one extraordinarily gifted. “All who heard him were amazed at his intelligence and the answers he gave” (2:47). Only His parents were not edified by the spectacle. They were astonished to see Him in the Temple. “His mother said to him, ‘My son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety’” (2:48). Jesus did not seem to understand their distress. Matter-of-factly, He countered: “What made you search for me? Did you not know that I was bound to be in what belongs to my Father?” (2:49). Most of the time, “what belongs to my Father” is understood as the Temple: To be in the Temple was for Jesus to be in the house of His Father. Yet, Jesus was much less concerned with the physical space in which He was than with the spiritual one. The teachers of the Law interpreted the Scriptures—they were what belonged to His Father. In Holy Writ, He recognized His Father’s word and will; hence, to them He felt beholden, and with them He had to be.2

From the beginning of its history, Israel was wont to see a written text as the expression of God’s will. The Covenant the Lord concluded with the people at Sinai after He had delivered it from Egypt was the very foundation of its existence. At that same hour, He gave the first outline of a law, the Decalogue or the “Ten Words,” as the Bible likes to call the Ten Commandments (see Ex 34:28; Dt 4:13, 10:4).3 Today, we can give full credence to the biblical statement that it was Moses who wrote down the Law for the people at the mountain of Sinai.

Even though Israel together unique in this to its other nations, It was custom to read the covenant duties worded the written text of the scrolls at every seven-year period. This was “scroll of the Lord” (Dt 31:10–11).

From Israel’s very governed and inspiration, one cannot yet spirits, the believer to Scripture comprehension, clearly and deeply into the Bible, even in post-exilic psalms, a scroll of light to the eye, it is likewise when the sight of the Lord and meditated the magnificent Psalms be understood. The Scriptures at the darkness, the believers, he has God’s unsaid. (56[55]:10–12). This strength, enabling his

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2. See Schmid’s commentary in the 2nd edition, op. cit. (1951, pp. 68ff). In the later editions, 1955 (pp. 82f) and 1960, he holds the opposite view.

Moses who wrote down the Ten Commandments and read them aloud to the people at the covenant ceremony (Ex 24:3–8).

Even though Israel's Covenant with its God was something altogether unique in the world of the ancient Orient, it was concluded under a form then customary at covenants between two secular partners. It was customary to base such a contract on a text in which the mutual obligations of the two contracting partners were formulated. This written text of the covenant was deposited at a sanctuary where it was read again and again at regular cultic celebrations so that the covenant duties would not be forgotten but rather made known to future generations. Thus the Bible says that Moses told the Levites to take the "scroll of the Law and put it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord" (Dt 31:24–26) and prescribed that, "at the end of every seven-year period," it be "read aloud in the presence of all Israel" (31:10–11).

From Israel's very birth, its religious and moral life was thus governed and inspired by a written text. True, in those ancient days one cannot yet speak of a personal relationship of the individual believer to Scripture. Yet as time moved on, Israel became ever more clearly and deeply the "People of the Book." The Babylonian exile had a decisive influence in this respect. In post-exilic times it was a matter of course to have the Torah before one's eyes. Ezra the Scribe brought a scroll of the Law from Babylon to Jerusalem and read aloud from it (Esd 7:1–26; Neh 8:1–8, 13–18; cf. Neh 13:1). When in post-exilic psalms, the Law is praised as giving joy to the heart and light to the eye, it is the written text that is meant (Ps 19[18]:8–9), likewise when the man is called happy who delights in the Law of the Lord and meditates on it, day and night (Ps 1:2). Only thus can the magnificent Psalm 119[118], that great hymn of the divine word, be understood.

The Scriptures are the sanctuary in which, at the hour of inner darkness, the believer finds light and firmness (73[72]:17). In them, he has God's unshakable promise of salvation amidst his persecutors (56[55]:10–12). They are a lamp at night and give him victorious strength, enabling him to bring about feats surpassing human power

They are the revelation forever present in Israel, a privilege Israel has before all other nations (147[147]:19-20). The Maccabees searched in them before making important decisions (1 Mac 3:48). The comforts of Holy Writ meant more to them than alliance, friendship, with the Spartans (1 Mac 12:9). The Scriptures are the sanctuary of God (Ps 73[72]:17), the house that divine wisdom built (Prov 9:1). When one recalls that in the Judaism of the day the Scriptures were compared to a temple and a sanctuary, the words of Jesus in the Temple, that He was bound to be in what belonged to His father, gain particular depth. At first glance, He seems to mean the Temple; actually, He refers to holy Scripture.6

The Gospel relates that all were amazed at Jesus' intelligence and at the questions He posed, that is, at the intelligence expressed in His questions. "In Jewish antiquity, the questions of disciples were an important part of the method of instruction." They served to stimulate attention, uncover vague ideas, and rectify wrong ones. One student's inquiries caused the counter-questions of another, and the discussions thus ensuing clarified the matter at hand while sharpening the mind. Tradition has R. Hanina (ca. 225 A.D.) say: "'Iron sharpens iron' (see Prov 27:17), which means: As one iron sharpens another, so do a scholar's disciples sharpen one another's minds." The following words are attributed to the same teacher: "I have learnt much from my teachers, from my colleagues more than from my teachers, but from my disciples more than from all others." Asking questions was instructive, therefore, not only for the student but for the teacher as well.

The amazing perception evident in the questions of Jesus testified not only to His outstanding intelligence but also to an excellent train-


6. In the spiritual milieu of Jesus, the juxtaposition of Scripture and Temple finds another expression in Jewish legends. According to the tradition embedded in them, both the Torah and the sanctuary were prefigured in heaven and revealed to Moses. (See L. Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews [Philadelphia, 1942], I, p. 3; III, pp. 80-82, 153f; V, pp. 132f; VI, p. 67, and passim.)


8. Strack-Billerbeck, op. cit., p. 153. The Soncino edition of The Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anith 7a, has: "...just as in the case of one [iron] iron sharpens the other so also do two scholars sharpen each other's mind by halachah" (p. 25).


11. Ibid., II, 178 (p. 187).


13. However, for Gaius looked upon the teacher as the most essential religious practices, but

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ing. For it was not without preparation that Jesus had mingled with the disciples of the Torah teachers in Jerusalem. In Nazareth where He grew up, there was no higher school comparable to the Temple school in Jerusalem that He could have attended. Still, even in the simple circumstances of Nazareth, there were opportunities for some training. Jewish children, boys in particular, received their first instruction from their parents. The parents' obligation to teach the Law to their children is laid down in Deuteronomy, in a text recited daily with the Shema: "Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest" (6:6-7).

On several occasions, Josephus Flavius variously praises the eagerness of Jewish parents:

Above all we pride ourselves on the education of our children, and regard as the most essential task in life the observance of our laws and of the pious practices, based thereupon, which we have inherited. Should anyone of our nation be questioned about the laws, he would repeat them all more readily than his own name. The result, then, of our thorough grounding in the laws from first dawn of intelligence is that we have them, as it were, engraven on our souls. A transgressor is a rarity; evasion of punishment by excuses an impossibility.

In a similar vein, Philo of Alexandria remarked:

Holding that the laws are oracles vouchsafed by God and having been trained in this doctrine from their earliest years, [the Jews] carry the likenesses of the commandments enshrined in their souls.

For [Gaius] looked with disfavor on the Jews alone because they alone opposed him on principle, trained as they were from the cradle, by parents and tutors and instructors and by the far higher authority of the sacred laws and also the unwritten customs, to acknowledge one God who is the Father and Maker of the world.

11. Ibid., II, 178 (Loeb, p. 365).
13. Ibid., par. 16 (Loeb, p. 57). For the Philo quotations see also E. Schuerer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ (New York, 1891), II, p. 48.
The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, a disciple and close associate who had been born of a Jewish mother: "From childhood, you have been acquainted with the sacred writings" (2 Tim 3:15).

Parents taught the Torah to their children by word of mouth and living precept, as the quoted passages from Josephus, Philo, and the New Testament indicate. Very few fathers may have been able to familiarize their children with the written text of the Torah. Only after a school system had been conceived and developed, could larger groups learn to read. In the beginning, private initiative led to the formation of small schools where teachers of Scripture attracted and instructed groups of disciples. Gradually, schools came under public control; at the time of Jesus, every sizable township in Palestine may have boasted an elementary school. The combination of school and synagogue, however, does not seem to have become the rule before the second century A.D. Hence, from the fact that there was a synagogue in Nazareth, we cannot take it for granted that there was a school; but we may assume it because of the conditions just related.

Learning to read was oriented to the Torah. Actually, enabling its students to read the Torah was the single goal of a school. To read and to learn the Torah were one and the same. It was the idea of the rabbis that a young Jew was to be led to the Torah at five years of age, to the Mishnah at ten, to observance of the Law at thirteen, to the Talmud at fifteen, and to the *chuppah*, the "wedding canopy," at eighteen. Thus school may have begun for Jesus at the age of five, as it does for children of Jewish Orthodox parents even today. For adults, this was followed by service. These are those who, as one man commented: "I am merely a scribe, that is the tradition has given to the teachers to instruct for many years the assistant." His contemporaries pursued a course of instruction that led to a liturgical service. They had to say, "Uncle, you have listened carefully, now you are a scholar." The childhood story by Thomas, which dates back to the second century, was widely known and influential for a long time. (See Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *Christus und die Jüd. Welt*, pp. 289-401.)


15. J. Bonsirven, in *Le judaisme palestinien au temps de Jésus-Christ* (Paris, 1954), I, p. 290, emphasizes, however, that in the first century A.D. elementary schools were widespread.

16. See ibid., p. 45.

17. *Ab. V*, 21; see B. Talmud, Soncino ed., *Abot*, pp. 74-75. It is interesting that the reading of the Torah began with the book Leviticus (see *Abot de R.N.*, 6).

18. Certain circles in the early Church were very much interested in "Jesus the pupil." "The Childhood Story by Thomas," which dates back to the second century, was widely known and influential for a long time. (See Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *Christus und die Jüd. Welt*, pp. 289-401.)

19. "In any grammatico, scholar" (J. 268).

adults, this instruction was complemented by sermons at the Sabbath service. The Gospel according to John speaks of the astonishment of those who, on a certain Sukkoth, observed Jesus teach: "How does this man come by learning since he has not studied?" (Jn 7:15). This merely means that Jesus did not have the special formation of a scribe, that is, a Scripture scholar; hence, he had not received the tradition handed from teacher to disciples, and the disciples-become-teachers to their disciples. The special formation not only required many years of study with a recognized teacher, but also serving as his assistant. Jesus, too, had His disciples stay with him day and night. His contemporaries were not aware that He had gone through such a course of instruction. For this reason, they were surprised to see Him act as a teacher of the Law.

WITH the learned interpreters of Scripture, the scribes, Jesus certainly meant that Scripture was—for Him as for them—the source of all knowledge about God and His ways. In His time, biblical exegesis of the midrashic type was an intensely practiced and flourishing science. To search the Scriptures, to interpret them, to extract from them all the possible meanings, to discuss the latter—this was the field of work proper to the scribes. Jesus sums up their ideal in these few words: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have life everlasting" (Jn 5:39). It is said of Ezra, the first

ed., New Testament Apocrypha, trans. R. McL. Wilson [Philadelphia, 1963], I, pp. 388-401.) This interest was not directed to the human development of Jesus, but it served rather to prove His miraculous powers and divine knowledge which preceded His schooling. In Nazareth about 570 A.D., pilgrims were shown a tomos on which Jesus had written the "ABC," and a log "on which he sat with other children." (Itineraria Hierosolymitana, in Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiastorum Latinorum, 39, 161).

19. "In any case, a man without complete rabbinical training was considered grammata mé memathékoí, one who could not claim the privileges of an ordained scholar" (J. Jeremias, Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu [3rd ed., Goettingen, 1962], p. 268).


scribe mentioned in the Bible: "Ezra had prepared his heart to search the law of the Lord, and to do and to teach in Israel the commandments and the judgment" (Esd 7:10). The Hebrew for "search [the law of the Lord]" derives from the root *drsh*; the same root appears in midrash, the Hebrew term for bible exegesis I mentioned before. It is obvious, then, that the era of Jewish history strongly influenced by Ezra was characterized by the importance given to biblical exegesis.

During that era, Israel became a community increasingly dedicated to the establishment of the reign of God's law. The Torah was the unique and comprehensive spiritual document that was to shape the hearts of the faithful, their style of life, indeed the way of the whole people. Everything is contained in the Torah, hence nothing exists without or outside it. One of its teachers, a disciple of Hillel and contemporary of Jesus, is reported to have said (the words may, in fact, be Hillel's): "Turn [the Torah] over and over for it contains everything. Look into it and become old and grey therein. Do not abandon it, for something better you will not find."  

The scribes had a twofold goal in studying the Scriptures: first, to enter ever more deeply into them; second, with their help to demonstrate doctrine. In the first instance, Scripture is studied for its own sake, without any other purpose. In rabbinical literature, Torah study for its own sake is hailed as the highest ideal.  

In the second instance, studies are directed toward a goal, the elaboration of a juridical or homiletic point. On the one hand, all legal decisions are to be drawn from Scripture; because it is the one and all, nothing must be added to it. The teachers endeavored, therefore, to find a biblical foundation even for legal decisions that went beyond the letter of Scripture. On the other hand, biblical interpretation was to edify and to nourish the spiritual life.

According to these two goals, midrash found expression in two different genres, Halakah and Aggadah. Halakah, "the walk," is the juridical exegesis that supports the law in force and regulates life.

Aggadah, "the tale and religious the schools, Aggad mostly on the legal. While Halakah aims to move the Hence, Aggadah is the teacher who directs disciples but wise groups and to influence of disciples as well both methods, the aggadic way of treatments in the discourse method is mostly historical.


23. See, for instance, *Abot VI*, 1: "Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake, acquires by merit many things, nay more, the whole of the world is worth while for his sake. He is called a friend, a beloved, one that loves the All-Present, one that loves [his fellow] creatures, one that gladdens God, one that gladdens man." (See *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Aboth*, p. 78.)
prepared his heart to search in Israel the commandments of God given to biblical exegesis. The Torah was the law that was to shape the whole way of the people. Since Jesus taught the small group of disciples as well as the multitudes, it is not surprising that He used both methods, halakic and aggadic. Obviously, the parables—the aggadic way of teaching—predominate. But we also find halakic elements in the discourses of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, the method is mostly halakic but very skillfully complemented by aggadic aspects.

Again and again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes, as demanded by the teaching method of the scribes, an Old Testament saying as a starting point. He introduces every saying with the formula: "You have heard that it was said to our forefathers," or "It was said" (Mt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Jesus does not confine Himself to a commentary on the relevant law but places another law in its stead: "But I say to you." Does He thereby deliberately, purposefully, leave the spiritual soil of His Jewish milieu? So it may appear at first glance. In reality, by this method of teaching, Jesus uses the Jewish tradition. The juxtaposition of "It is said" and "I say to you" was an exegetical method current among the scribes. The contrast does not imply, as has often been assumed, that Jesus sets a new and perfect law against the old and imperfect one; rather does He give an authoritative interpretation of the Law. With the formula, "It is said," a Torah command is quoted; with the words, "I say to you," the scribe introduces the interpretation he gives by virtue of his authority as a Torah teacher. The instruction given to the forefathers is the Mosaic law, in particular the Decalogue. According to Jewish thinking, no one, not even the Messiah, is entitled to abrogate or supersede the

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ancient Torah of Moses. It was given for all eternity; no one may add or subtract anything.

Jesus refers to this concept when, in the Sermon on the Mount, He prefaces His interpretation of the Torah with these words: "Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For amen I say to you, so long as heaven and earth last, not a letter nor a stroke will be lost from the Law until all things have been accomplished" (Mt 5:17-18). It is not the teacher's task to change the old Law or, worse, to abolish it and put another in its place; rather, he is to interpret the old Law ever anew, determine and apply it to concrete situations. More than all other teachers before and of His time, Jesus knows Himself to be called and empowered to interpret the Torah in a new way, to bring to light the great wealth of divine thoughts deeply embedded in it. His teaching is not a new Torah but leads the old Torah to its ultimate fulfillment, in the spirit of His program: "I have not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it." Discreetly, He thus implies that He is the Messiah expected by the Jewish people. For the ultimate interpretation of the Torah of Moses, one valid for all time, can be given by the Messiah alone.26

The attentive reader of the Gospels is struck again and again by the positive attitude of Jesus toward the Law of His people. In speaking of Jesus' childhood, Luke repeatedly stresses that He was under the Law (2:22-24, 27, 39).27 Just at the moment that the Levitic law was fulfilled by the humble sacrifice for purification (Lev 12:8), the prophetic testimony of old Simeon shines on Him:

My eyes have seen your salvation
Which you have prepared in the sight of the nations:
A light of revelation to the gentiles,
And a glory to your people Israel.

(Lk 2:30-32)

Jesus wore the prescribed tassels, tiсttit, on His garment (Mt 9:20); He attended the Sabbath service at the Synagogue and ob-


served the festival over with His disciples.

Jesus gave unto a covenant charter, Words a condition, the countryside, a feet, and asked: "God. And Jesus replied commit adultery, you bear false witness, and mother" (Mk of the Torah, He from Deuteronomy your heart, with a cf. 10:12). The seven in Leviticus: "You. According to Hil foundation of the, between the relig that the be the quintessence- disciples.29

Even where Jesus bases it—as was the resurrection of Abraham, and bases it—as was the Divorce, which H precept (Dt 24:1 the Torah: "For the clings to his wife, 28. See W. Bacher 29. Not long ago, by a simple and mean January 5, 1964, he...
served the festival pilgrimages to Jerusalem; He celebrated the Passover with His disciples.

Jesus gave unreserved assent to Israel's fundamental Law, the covenant charter, the Decalogue. He made fulfillment of the Ten Words a condition for entering Life. Once, while walking through the countryside, a rich man ran toward him, threw himself at His feet, and asked: "Good Master, what shall I do to gain eternal life?" And Jesus replied: "You know the commandments: You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not withhold wages, honor your father and mother" (Mk 10:17-19).

Asked for the greatest commandment of the Torah, He names two (Mk 12:28-31). The first He takes from Deuteronomy: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (6:5; cf. 10:12). The second, to which He gives equal importance, He finds in Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18). According to Hillel and Akiba, the latter commandment is the foundation of the whole Torah. 28 One cannot imagine a closer bond between the religion of Moses and the prophets and that of Jesus than the fact that He declared a commandment of the Mosaic law to be the quintessence of the morality proclaimed by Himself and His disciples. 29

Even where Jesus offers a teaching that is new and all His own, He bases it—as was the duty of a scribe—on the Scriptures. He proves the resurrection of the dead with God's declaration: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Mt 22:32). None else would have discovered in this scriptural saying (Ex 3:6) the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. But Jesus draws from it that the God of Israel is forever a God of the living. Divorce, which His contemporaries accept on the basis of a Mosaic precept (Dt 24:1), He condemns by the power of another saying of the Torah: "For this reason a man leaves his father and mother, and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh" (Mt 19:5; cf. Gen 28. See W. Bacher, Die Aggada der Tannaiten (Strasbourg, 1884), I, p. 7.

29. Not long ago, the government of Israel expressed this highly important fact by a simple and meaningful gesture: When Pope Paul VI visited the country on January 5, 1964, he was given a medal with the inscription, in Hebrew, French, and English, of the text from Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18).
Jesus could not have founded His teaching on any other soil than that of the Old Testament Scriptures. Had he wanted to do otherwise, He would have had to place them in a vacuum. Scripture was the air His listeners were wont to breathe, the spiritual realm in which they felt at home. Only in that soil could His teaching take root.

When instructing their disciples, teachers of the Law used two kinds of argument, which are generally called *demonstratio a maio re ad minus* and *demonstratio a minore ad maius*. Rendered freely, the first means: "If something of major importance is permitted, something of minor importance is permitted too." The second says: "What applies to a small matter, applies just as much, or even more, to a greater one." We may expect, then, to find this procedure in the sermons of Jesus and, of course, in Paul's writings as well.  

I. *A maio re ad minus*, "from the greater to the smaller." Jesus employs this line of reasoning several times:

1. Matthew 12:1–5: If David and his companions were allowed to eat the loaves of proposition in the house of God without sinning; again, if the priests were allowed to slaughter and prepare the sacrificial animals on the Sabbath without breaking it, His hungry disciples may pluck a few ears of grain and eat the kernels.

2. Matthew 12:9–13: If one is permitted to rescue on the Sabbath a sheep that has fallen into a pit, then one is permitted with even greater justification to heal a man. (To do so implies less toil.) Similar situations and arguments are found in Luke 13:10–17 and 14:1–6.

II. *A minore ad maius*, "from the smaller to the greater." In such a context, the conclusion is, as a rule, introduced by the phrase "how much more." For this manner of argument, too, we have well-known examples in the sermons of Jesus:

1. Matthew 6:25–30: If the Father in heaven feeds the birds and clothes the lilies of the field, how much more will He do this for His children.

2. Matthew 7:9–11: If evil men give good things to their children (and not a stone instead of a loaf of bread nor a serpent instead of a fish), how much more will the Father in heaven be ready to do the same for His own.

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In Matthew's versi Father," corresponding At the time of Jesus, c or "Our Father." In th called *Tefillah*, that its permanent form a prayer that Jews recit are made:

31. Based on older col *tesdienst in seiner gesc printing, Hildesheim, 196:
One of the most priceless legacies Jesus left His disciples is the prayer that we call, after Him, the "Lord's Prayer," or according to the opening words, the "Our Father." In English, German, or other modern languages, no one would address his father as "my father" or "our father." Thus, even the difficulty of rendering the address of the Lord's prayer into idiomatic English or German proves that the prayer had its origin and home in Hebrew or Aramaic. It would be strange should its phrases and images not reflect the mental world of the Judaism of that time. This applies as much to the invocation as to the individual petitions.

Two of the four evangelists relate that Jesus taught His disciples a model prayer, Matthew (6:9–13) and Luke (11:2–4). According to Luke, the disciples elicited this instruction: "And it came to pass as he was praying in a certain place, that when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples'" (11:1). That John taught his disciples to pray is mentioned only here. Yet it was a customary custom of the time for a Jewish teacher to teach his disciples a prayer. John the Baptist had attracted a group of followers and naturally taught them a followers' prayer. The same was, as a matter of course, expected of Jesus; He would probably have done so even if His disciples had not expressly asked Him to. Matthew does not mention such an advance of the disciples. In his Gospel, Jesus takes the word of His own accord and offers His disciples a prayer, which is meant to be their prayer.

In Matthew's version, the prayer begins with the address "Our Father," corresponding to the Hebrew avinu or the Aramaic abuna. At the time of Jesus, devout Jews used to address God as "My Father" or "Our Father." In the Shemoneh Esre, the Eighteen Blessings, also called Tefillah, that is, simply, Prayer—a prayer that was given its permanent form at the beginning of the second century A.D.—a prayer that Jews recite three times a day—the following supplications are made:

Our Father and King, cause us to turn to your teaching and to your service draw us near. Bring us back through perfect repentance before you. Blessed are you, Lord who is pleased by penitence.

Our Father and King, forgive us for we have sinned, and pardon us for we have transgressed; for you, O God, are good and forgiving. Blessed are you, Lord, abundantly gracious in pardon.32

No doubt, the prayer avinu malkenu—so called because each petition begins with the invocation "Our Father, our King"—is the most solemn part of the liturgy of the highest Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Luke's version of the Lord's prayer does not contain the address "Our Father," as Matthew's does and as was common with the Jewish worshipper, but simply "Father," according to the Aramaic abba. Abba sounds more confident, more intimate, than abuna. Children in the Palestine of that day called their fathers abba, as children do in today's State of Israel. But to call God by this name was considered too audacious and therefore improper. The whole treasury of Jewish prayer does not have a single instance of the worshipper addressing God as abba.33

Now, which form of address goes back directly to Jesus' instruction, the Lucan "Father," or the Matthean "Our Father"? The question forces itself on us, but is there a way for us to decide? As is well known, the two versions of the Lord's prayer differ not only in the form of address but also in the number of petitions. Matthew has seven, Luke only five. In Luke, the last of the "You" as well as the last of the "We" petitions is absent. It is much more probable that, at their community services, the disciples would enlarge upon the prayer they had received from their Lord, rather than shorten it. Who would have dared to strike out two supplications of the "Our Father" if they were really part of the oldest tradition? But for the reverse—that liturgical texts of the early days were, prior to their definite shape, embellished, enlarged, enriched—there is much more documentation.34

Present-day New Testament scholarship is quite able to show (to do so here would lead us far afield) that the original one, even older and more ancient, was the Matthean:

Our Father and King, cause us to turn to your teaching and to your service draw us near. Bring us back through perfect repentance before you. Blessed are you, Lord who is pleased by penitence.

Our Father and King, forgive us for we have sinned, and pardon us for we have transgressed; for you, O God, are good and forgiving. Blessed are you, Lord, abundantly gracious in pardon.32

We must, therefore, rather than to the Matthean, to the Lucan, "Our Father," Jesus began His prayer at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:36; John 17:1), and according to the Lucan, the whole petition "Father" (Rom 8:26) was added after the Father into the request of the Father. He led the disciples from their Lord into the relationship of "Father" with the Father. It was the disciples who took up the prayer of Jesus' message of the new patrimony of His sons surpassing itself. This pattern of prayer spread in the community in Jerusalem and by the end of the first century was taken up again by the early Christians.

In the petition "Our Father," the disciples from their Lord called God the Father, and have passed from the Petition "Father" (Rom 8:26) into the Paternal "Father" into the relationship of the Father. It was the disciples who took up the prayer of Jesus' message of the new patrimony of His sons surpassing itself. This pattern of prayer spread in the community in Jerusalem and by the end of the first century was taken up again by the early Christians.

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so here would lead too far afield) that the Lucan version is the original one, even though individual phrases in Matthew may be older and more authentic. We must, therefore, give preference to the Lucan address “Father” rather than to the Matthean “Our Father.” We know, in fact, that Jesus began His prayer to the Father with Abba, “Father” (Mk 14:36), and according to the apostle Paul, who belong to Christ and have passed from bondage to sonship, may address God as Abba, “Father” (Rom 8:15). Jesus did not introduce the image of God as Father into the realm of piety but brought us a new relationship to the Father. He let His disciples take part in His own relationship with the Father. It is a situation similar to the fulfillment of the Law: Jesus’ message of the fatherhood of God is rooted in the spiritual patrimony of His people and, at the same time, makes that patrimony surpass itself. This leads us to understand why the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem—where the Matthean Gospel had its home—again took up the familiar address, “Our Father, you are in Heaven,” while Luke handed the “new” address, “Father,” over to gentile Christians.

In the petitions, too, Jesus speaks a language familiar to the disciples from their own religious upbringing. It may suffice to explain this with the help of two “You” supplications, since it is not the purpose of this essay to interpret the whole “Our Father.”

“Hallowed be your name”: This takes us to the beginning of the Kaddish:

Exalted and hallowed be God’s great name in this world of His creation. Amen.

May His will be fulfilled by the revelation of His kingship and the flowering of His salvation. Amen.

Strikingly enough, the first sentence of the Kaddish contains three concepts that are the themes of the first three petitions of the “Our

35. See ibid., pp. 155–160.
36. It is not quite correct to see Jesus’ rootedness in the Jewish tradition in a sevenfold structure of supplications (see Soiron, op. cit., p. 334). The custom may, however, explain why the Jewish-Christian community of the disciples enlarged Jesus’ original prayer from five to seven petitions.
37. See Book of Prayer, p. 18.
Father” (the first two of which are in Matthew as well as in Luke, while the third appears only in Matthew): the name of God, His Kingship (or Kingdom), and His will. This makes clear that the first three petitions of the “Our Father” are very close to one another.

The Name to be hallowed is, of course, God Himself. This usage derives from the widespread spiritual reserve, already evident in Old Testament writings and very much stronger in early Judaism, which kept Jews from naming God directly. The passive mode springs from the same reverence. To ask God that His name be hallowed is to ask Him that He hallow His name. In order to avoid even the semblance of a demand on God and to give the petition a humble character, the disciples are to pray, not “Hallow your name,” but “May your name be hallowed.” If “name” stands for God, and the passive mode for the active one, we would ask the Father, were we to address Him in our own idiom: “Hallow yourself!” But according to our sentiments, God cannot hallow Himself—He is holy—but He can hallow men. According to the biblical pattern of speech, however, God “hallows” Himself when He glorifies Himself, when He reveals His glory, and makes Himself acknowledged by men by performing a salvific deed. Ezekiel promises that God will “hallow His great name” before the gentiles by bringing Israel home from captivity—thus will He prove “His holiness in their sight” (36:23–24).

“Hallow your name” also means: In your mercy, make all men know and acknowledge you. Jesus’ disciples could hardly remain indifferent when saying this prayer. In the Judaism of Jesus’ time, the idea was very much alive that, by his moral conduct and by his good deeds, man sanctifies the name of God. When we then ask the Father to hallow His name, we ask that He give us the grace to live so that other men feel invited to lift their eyes and hearts to God, confidently, cheerfully, and gratefully. In biblical language, the terms “to hallow” (kaddesh, hagiazein) and “to glorify” (kabbed, doxazein) are akin. At the end of His life, Jesus confessed that He had glorified the Father on earth by accomplishing the work God had given Him to do (Jn 17:4). He exhorted the disciples to let their light shine so that men would see their good works and, therefore, glorify the Father in heaven (Mt 5:16).

“Your kingdom come” is the first petition of the petition envisio

Hence the tradition because it makes the petition envisio

as in Luke, inasmuch as in Luke, inasmuch as in Luke, it is clear that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God, is to come to one another. This usage is evident in Old Testament Judaism, which allowed is to ask in the semblance of the character, the name. May your name be doxazexin, to God, con.

The reign of God was a familiar concept, Jesus' Jewish listeners associated definite mental images with it. Hence Jesus did not explain the expression, He simply presupposed its understanding. To

What was said of the hallowing of the name must also be applied to the coming of God's reign. Each is God's doing but neither can happen without human cooperation. Jesus indicated this when, in one breath, He said: "The reign of God has come. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). "Repent" in Hebrew or Aramaic means literally "turn [to God]," in Greek "think anew": No longer are men to think their own thoughts but the thoughts of God. "Believe in the

in heaven (Mt 5:16). It is in this sense that we must understand the first petition of the "Our Father."

"Your kingdom come." God's kingdom is to come not only "to us" but to India, to Russia, to China, in short to the whole world. What the petition envisions is a world-historical event, not a spatial area. Hence the traditional term "kingdom of God" is not exactly suitable because it makes us think of a territory. The Hebrew or Aramaic malkut Jesus used means God's kingship or kingly rule. Jesus makes us pray for the full revelation of God's kingship or the coming of His reign. They do not come to themselves nor can they be brought about by men but only by God. We must therefore beg for them. Again, the petition is expressed in the passive mode in order to exclude the thought that we had a claim on God's kingship. The meaning of the petition is, however, "Bring about your [undisputed} kingly rule."

The theme of God's kingship dominated Jesus' preaching. "And after John had been delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand'" (Mk 1:14-15). This, then, was His glad tidings: "The reign of God is near." The Jewish people of those days awaited the budding of God's reign impatiently, indeed, feverishly. This is why Jesus' proclamation caused such excitement. The reign of God is not a spatial factor but an event, the salvific event that, instead of the present disorder, will establish God's order in the world.
gospel": They are to open their hearts to the word and will of God, to His grace and His salvation. Then God will rule, then His order will be established in the world.

When man bends under the word and will of God, "he takes upon himself," according to Jewish usage at Jesus' time, "the yoke of the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is not a hard yoke but a gentle one, as Jesus calls His yoke "good to bear" (Mt 11:29-30). To accept God's reign means, therefore, not only to keep the Commandments, but to submit, lovingly and unselfishly, to God.39 That the Father may effect this spirit in His children is the content of the second petition. The third, "Your will be done on earth as in heaven," which only Matthew gives, merely continues the second petition without adding anything new.

Jesus warned His disciples against too many words when praying; they should make their prayers short. As model of a short prayer, He gave them the "Our Father." In this respect, Jesus stands out from His Jewish environment which loved long prayers and in which the Eighteen Blessings played a dominating role. The Mishnah, however, foresees an instance when the devout man is to say a short prayer: when setting out on a dangerous journey.40 The disciples were always on a dangerous road. Hence He gives them a short prayer for the way.

IV

Scholars have not been lacking who called the "Our Father" the most Christian of all prayers. No less a man than Harnack held this view. Actually, the exact opposite is true. There is nothing specifically Christian about it, except for the intimate tone that Jesus was the first to use in talking to the Father, and which He invited His disciples to accept. A Christian may, without giving up any of his convictions and without reservations, pray almost all Jewish prayers. The reverse cannot, of course, be asked of Jews. But a Jew may, without reservation, pray the "Our Father." In it, he will rediscover what is most beautiful in his people's liturgical tradition. It is, therefore, a prayer

39. See Bonsirven, Judaisme, II, p. 35.
40. Ber. 29b; see B. Talmud, Soncino ed., Berachot, pp. 180f.
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I and will of God, then His order is our will and will of God, "he takes upon himself, the yoke of the Lord," the yoke of the Lord. To keep the Commandments, "thine is the content of the earth as in heaven," the second petition of the Lord's prayer was always a short prayer, He stood out from the Mishnah, however, without reservation, a prayer for the way.

"Our Father" the disciples of Harnack held this nothing specifically unlike that Jesus was the invited His disciples over what is most suitable for meetings of Christians and Jews, to be said in concert. Today more than ever, we are looking for common prayers. How beautiful it would be were the "Our Father" to become, not only the common prayer of all Christians, but also the common prayer of Jews and Christians. There is no nobler cup in which a Jew or Christian can offer himself to the Lord.

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