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Hilaire Duesberg, O.S.B.

THE TRIAL OF THE MESSIAH

I

TWO thousand years—still this trial goes on.

Nothing matches the serenity with which the Apostles' Creed affirms: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." Souls rally around this confession; with lips and heart they cleave to the revelation of the God who is unique and thus universal. The truth they proclaim is therefore unique and universal; it is offered to all men.

The inspiration of this article of the Creed is biblical: "Jesus" is the Hebrew *Yehoshua* or *Yeshua*, "Yahweh saves"; "Christ" is the Hebrew *Masiah*, "the Anointed One"; "Lord" is the Greek *Kyrios*, a royal title, used by the Septuagint to translate the divine name Yahweh. Thus does the Creed evoke the terminology of that Scripture we call the Old Testament. To the point that revealed truth acknowledges copyright, these formulae belong to the Jews.

Indeed the truths of the Creed have been transmitted to us by Jews: by Peter, Paul, and John, and that as the expression of the Jewish hope. Hence the Apostles' Creed is a rallying point not only for Christians but also for Jews. It gives tongue to their religious unanimity in the joy of the Messiah come, the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham: In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed (Gen 12:3).

The times are accomplished; the Messiah is here! Japheth dwells under the tents of Shem (Gen 9:27).

*It shall come to pass in that day:
The root of Jesse,
who stands as ensign of the peoples,
Him the nations shall seek,
and His resting place shall be glorious.*

(Is 11:10)

In that glorious perspective, the privilege of the children of Abraham is proclaimed, and its paths lead converted pagans to the temple of Jerusalem; in a semitism of the spirit, the human race recovers its pristine unity.

Salvation is from the Jews; it has come from the Jews; it has come from a Jew.

II

AND so it is the Jews who announce to us, the Gentiles, the news that the soil of Palestine has brought forth the fruit of salvation, that Jesus of Nazareth, the Legate of God, has dwelt among us and that they have lived beside Him. It is on their witness that the Roman Church has formulated her faith in the terms of the Creed.

But what do I say? Their witness? The majority of the "nation of Israel" opposes to our confession this disclaimer: "The Nazarene was perhaps an estimable rabbi even though only self-taught; perhaps he was also in the line of the prophets, but his audacity was unbounded. As for being the Messiah—certainly not! The expectation of Israel has not been fulfilled. On the memory of Jesus there hangs like a weight the verdict of Pontius Pilate, kept green in the Creed, motivated by the official complaint of the Sanhedrin. Jesus was crucified in the Roman fashion, but as a false prophet, as a blasphemer who made himself the Son of God. In exalting him as the Messiah, by invoking him as God, as the only Son of the Father, the Christian Creed falls into a bizarre error: it does violence to the majesty of the divine monarchy." In brief, the learned among the Jews did not recognize the mission of the Nazarene.

Hence the foreseen unanimity of faith is shattered from the beginning and that in the very bosom of the Jewish people. The heritage of Abraham is split; henceforth, there will be two religions: that of Law and Temple, that of the Nazarene. There will be two contradictory ways of reading Scripture, indeed two editions of Scripture, one of them bipartite, composed of Old and New Testaments. Out of fidelity to our common God, the Messiah is contested and rejected: such is the point of the trial. It perdures from the time of Jesus and only the end of time will vindicate Jew or Christian. Only God or His Legate could sit in judgment on this lamentable contestation, and Jesus, by invoking the

prophecy of Daniel (Mt 26:64; Dan 7:13), foretold the decision to Caiphas when He announced His return in the clouds of heaven.

Mere men cannot pretend to settle the debate with authority. Nevertheless it has arisen; nothing to do but bear with it. There is no question here of pretending that the claims of the two parties are equal, but in adopting the Christian thesis we are not thereby relieved of the concern to allay around us the anguish of soul which springs from this apparent check to the divine plan. Jews and Christians remain brothers in Abraham and the lot of our brothers is our concern. We can hardly answer in the manner of Cain!

III

WHY and how have the Jews been brought to division on the question of Jesus of Nazareth?

It is a problem of importance. A long-standing divergence of views has embittered their minds. They have treasured the memory of evil procedures, of polemic excesses. On the primitive soil of the controversy, a layer of debris has accumulated, so thick it disheartens our effort. It is essential to return to the spirit of the New Testament, too often misinterpreted.

We Jews and Christians have a common experience of our God; we know that His ways, straight though they be, are for all that astonishing in where they lead. The trial of the Messiah is at bottom God's trial. Hence we must question Him in His Scriptures, with the assurance that the refusal of Jesus by His own people could not have taken Him unawares.

Let us not delay over the procedure nor over the execution of Jesus. For the world's salvation, they are inscribed in the liturgy of Abel and of Isaac, and their scope is infinite. We shall come back to them. Enough for the moment to note that this juridical action is but the result of a position taken in advance and which sought support in the texts: Deuteronomy (13:1-5) fixes the death penalty for false prophets, and such was the legal charge which weighed upon the Nazarene. The lot of blasphemers was hardly more mild (Ex 20:7; 22:28; Lev 24:10-16). This was the Law—it was applied.

On this point the younger brothers yield nothing to their elders, the Jews. If they have not stoned false prophets, they have burned them.

Savonarola, the witch of Orleans—it is Joan of Arc I mean—and so until that thoughtless unfortunate, Michael Servetus, who managed to be condemned simultaneously by the Holy Office and by John Calvin!

True enough, the Geneva which burned him has given Servetus a monument to make amends, Joan of Arc has been canonized, the memory of Savonarola continues to become less offensive. We raise sepulchers to the prophets our fathers killed. Long ago Jesus noted the custom; His comments on it were severe (Lk 11:47-48).

IV

THE trial of the Messiah touches on the honor of God; it consists of this dilemma:

Either: In misleading His own, Jesus misled Himself. The case of a crowd of simple folk, fanaticized by some enchanter into anticipating the hour of God, was in those days frequent, even common. It was no more than a mistake as to time, due to impatience. Gamaliel has deftly thrown light on the theology of this sort of incident (Ac 5:35-39). No violence should be used; let things follow their providential course. A flame unnourished by the Holy Spirit dies out of itself whereas, if the Spirit did strike the spark, the zealots who wish to quench it wrestle with God. Now, on the hypothesis that Jesus was a false Messiah—what is then astonishing about “the Nazarene schism,” what rightly alarms religious souls, is that far from having weakened, it persists, grows, basing itself on Scripture and on the fact of the resurrection. Is God tolerant to the point of complicity?

Or perhaps: The Christians are the authentic Jews. This hypothesis is no less disconcerting than the first, because then it must be admitted that the chosen people, the elect, the servant-people, the son-people, the confidant of divine perspectives, the trustee of the promises of the salvific Law, at the very moment when they were living in suspense, panting with hope for a Messiah to come, scanning the Scriptures with all their learning, blundered crudely. Out of zeal for religion, they put the divine Legate to death. Such is the Christian teaching, and it is one which goes back to Jesus Himself: He dramatized it in the parable of the vine dressers (Mt 21:33-45 with its reference to Ps 117:22). What difficulties this interpretation of history raises!

V

THERE is one answer so simple it is false. It consists in gathering those texts of Scripture in which the people of Israel are taken to task for their infidelities and then concluding blandly that their "perfidy" flows from them as from its native source: "Stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ear, you always oppose the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so you do also. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you have now been the betrayers and murderers, you who received the Law as an ordinance of angels, and did not keep it" (Ac 7:51-53).

In the mouth of the deacon Stephen, this foreshortening of history has the same meaning as the accusation in the parable of the vine dressers. Its intention is to state not that *the* Jews, but that *some* Jews, have, from one age to another, remained insensible to the illuminating measures of Yahweh because these struck at their conservative prejudices. They had for religious institutions, the Temple for example, an esteem superior to that which they had for the word of God—sudden, alive, harassing, provocative, which alarmed their hearts, hardened in the routine accomplishment of good. Stephen, like his Master, was Jewish. We can hardly find in their reproaches some I-know-not-what sort of racism, a racism which would permit the disciples of Jesus to detect a peculiar affinity between the blood of Abraham and perfidy. The quarrel is among Jews; it would be an impertinence for Gentiles to intrude themselves into the debates between God and His people.

Nor should we lose sight of the fact that the "saints" of the primitive Church often enough caused concern to the bearers of the Good News. Recall the disciples of the Baptist and their distrust of Jesus, the inconstancy of the Galatians, the cliques at Corinth, the Asiatic heresies. According to Stephen, sacred history proceeds in a pattern of shade and light. Hence the racist answer is not the key, for it can be used only against the descendants of Abraham. And to do so would be to miss, in our reading of Scripture, that the Israelites alone were admitted to a dialogue with the living God, that they were the only ones He took into His confidence, indeed the only ones whom He chastened like foolish children.

Reread the divine utterances against the pagans and listen to the tone they take toward Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, or the Pharaohs: there you will gauge the difference between a father's reprimand and the threats hurled against foreign despots. And then turn to the lashing rebukes St. Paul administered to the Corinthians, or the Apocalypse to the churches of Asia. None is clean, none of the elect escapes the reproach of infidelity. The divine arraignment spares no one, moral misery is as universal as is the abuse of divine grace. Such is the burden of the Epistle to the Romans, and the Catechism of the Council of Trent throws the responsibility for the Passion on all sinners.

If the Christ is for Isaiah a sign of rallying, He is for the aged Simeon one of contradiction (Lk 2:34-35). He will reveal the state of consciences, cleanse them of the underbrush of formalist institutions. His coming is a foretaste of the Judgment; it is a trial which denudes our hearts; it justifies God.

VI

NO NEED for the adverse reactions which surround the divine epiphanies to make us lose our way. They no more put in question the effectiveness of God's action than they do its persistence; the salvation of the human race remains the fixed aim of these heavenly interventions.

Every page of the Bible demonstrates that the partial check and the delayed success are the pattern of salvation. The Synagogue has no more betrayed her mission than has the Church: if, at the time of Jesus, she weakened, it was because she had already brought forth her fruit. One institution declined, another arose: all flesh was to see the victory of our God. If we dare pride ourselves that the Church will never be guilty of the essential error into which the Sanhedrin fell, let us remember that it is because the experience of the past preserves her by putting her on guard against it; let us remember that it is because the Spirit is poured out in abundance on all the living since the day of Pentecost.¹ Far be it from us to appeal to some I-know-not-what wisdom, secreted naturally by the Aryan genius!

Ours it is to read Scripture in a spirit of synthesis and with daring:

1. These two reasons for the Church's firm dwelling in the truth must, of course, be read together. Her experience, her wisdom, are more than human: they are gifts of the Spirit. If she does not fail, it is because of Christ's promise in Mt 28:20 that He will be with her "all days, even unto the consummation of the world." [Editor.]

we shall know then that the divine plan unrolls inexorably but in a zigzag course. The course follows a law of loss and gain, the loss and gain of that supernatural heat generated by the interplay of divine omnipotence and human freedom, which obeys, cooperates—even when it seems to break all bonds, to escape, or to throw up obstacles. Attentive readers of the Bible are familiar with the hesitant pace of the divine advance, those apparent repentings, those retouchings of the original plan God permitted. The Day of Yahweh is drawing near nonetheless, and such readers sense the dawn even while the carnal are persuaded that the night is eternal.

Scripture is a witness between Jews and Christians. The exegesis of Christians is bold, revolutionary, in keeping with the exegesis their Master preached. He came to fulfill the Law, but at the price of what simplifications! Were they arbitrary? By no means; rather were they founded on the experience of many millennia. To show that the first Christians knew what they were doing when they accepted Jesus, consider the scriptural constants they invoked with their coreligionists, the Jews, and later with the Gentiles. Their argument put the doings of God beyond all controversy and that on His own testimony.

Sacred history is ruled by certain laws.

The law of opportunity. There is the sudden thrusting of God into the course of history, offering Himself to His elect as savior or as avenger. Thus Isaiah sped to Achaz to reassure him on the consequences of the alliance between Samaria and Damascus (Is 7).

The law of the incognito. It is evident in those perplexing divine disguises which mislead false sages while illuminating hearts that are right and stripped of narrow native prejudice. Thus the Servant of Yahweh, in whom there was no comeliness, seemed fit for contempt in order that His wounds might redeem His people (Is 52, 53).

The law of the systematic reversal of listed values. It is the vindication of the divine autonomy, unfettered by its own prescriptions. Thus was preference accorded in Genesis to the younger over the elder sons.

The law of munificence. God "breaks" His promises by giving more than He had offered; what was material in the offer becomes spiritual in the fulfillment. Thus the catholic glory of Jerusalem; its spatial bonds broken, it becomes the center of faith.

The law of free vocations. Free as to the call, free as to its answer, it is the law of exact correspondence to the divine invitation. Thus the

"remnant" of Israel is faithful to Yahweh in spite of general apostasy, and this stubborn fidelity saves the mass of the people.

These divine calls are, in short, the fruit of a selection. And how is it made? By God who reveals Himself, by man who gives consent. Gideon recruits shock troops by putting them to the test: keeps the keen, disbands the others. What distinguishes one from the other is endurance and the ability to carry on with a minimum. The indispensable attitude in the relationships between the faithful and Yahweh is to extend Him credit: our religion rests upon the obstinate trust of believers.

Thus Abraham was obedient at once to the law of delay and to the law of munificence. The promises are glowing; the fulfillment is delayed beyond the birth of Isaac, indeed much later yet. That first favor God showed Abraham was no more than a pledge. So also with the law of reversal: it must be accepted without jealousy by the elder brothers; Cain, Esau, the brothers of Joseph broke it to their loss. A supernatural second sight helps track down the divine incognitos. The relatives of Samson reject the old belief that the sight of Yahweh kills: if He shows Himself, it can only be for their benefit. And Rahab, a hostess opportunist by profession, when the occasion presented itself in the person of the Hebrew spies, had the insight to take her profit while the meeting lasted; she and all her family were saved from the ruin of Jericho.

The Christian catechesis discovers these laws and the insights they control once again in the story of Jesus. He is the propitious occasion, not to be missed no matter what people may say. "If I touch but His cloak, I shall be saved," said the woman suffering hemorrhage, and she was healed (Mk 5:28-29). So all the infirm who, on encountering Jesus, pressed forward to implore the alleviation of their ills. The poor worthies of the Gospels had small knowledge of the circumlocutions human respect imposes.

The incognito of Jesus held up badly: the very demons exposed it, and His enemies scented beneath His humility some unwonted grandeur. The law of reversal worked in His favor: this rabbi, this prophet, hardly met the standards. He had attended no schools; He healed on the Sabbath day and it was no secret that He did it deliberately. Besides, He was nothing but a Galilean, a product of that "district of the Gentiles," sprung from the insignificant hamlet of Nazareth.

To what purpose His discourses? To the fulfillment of the Law? But how sharply He abridged it in his commentary! He had biting words for religious institutions. Whither would He lead Israel? Good-natured with sinners, easy of access to peasants, He was hard on the scribes, indifferent to the greater interests of the nation. He fascinated His hearers with paradox, He routed the doctors of the Law. In a word, He was a scandal to the sedate as Job had been a puzzle to his counselors of prudence, as Jeremiah had been an exasperation to the politicians.

VII

FOR Christians, the religion of the Bible is an uninterrupted "creation" of the cosmos—and it is in Scripture that they claim to have read it. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ works without cease (cf. Jn 5:17). It is a religion of movement because, from the Oak of Mamre to the Burning Bush, from Sinai to the Dedication of the Temple, its manifestations come in series; it is progressive because it is made up of promises which give upon an indefinite future. From stage to stage it moves through a landscape which renews itself, never becoming static. Not that the present abolishes the past; it uses the past in bringing it to perfection, without cease it recalls the past to justify itself and meanwhile it already evokes the future. Truly, the biblical religion is a dynamic religion, never complacent, ever magnifying its God, the indefectible Creator. Enough to say that in the name of the freedom of the Spirit of Yahweh, the religion of the Bible, confronting the partisans of the past, wears the guise of opposition and contradiction. And this is the way the prophets understood it.

Yet that religion was at all times institutional: a solemn cult, regulated, complicated; a priesthood and a royalty, both of them hereditary, established in the form of caste; by a necessary consequence its tendencies were conservative. These institutions were written into the Law, and the whole corpus of Scripture—legislation, narratives, prophecies—became itself an institution, guarded jealously to the letter. To this a tradition was superimposed with its glosses and commentaries. It was as much a guarantee of the future as of the past; it imposed itself with all the weight of divine promulgation.

The Law, the priesthood, the royal line perdured for centuries. They constituted a long spiritual experience, a heritage to be protected. Na-

tionalism, a taste for independence, the control of opinions, slipped in among the divine institutions to safeguard them. Could it be that they might come to supplant them? The risk is common to all religions. Who did not believe in 1870 that the loss of the temporal power would be prejudicial to the papacy? Certainly it is what the enemies of the Church hoped and the faithful feared. It is impossible to escape the tutelage of the milieu in which one lives and difficult to disengage oneself without loss.

The institutions of Israel were the witnesses of the past; they husbanded that future which was called the Messiah. He it was who would give all direction to the Law. He would be at once its fruit and its justification. At His coming it would blossom into victory.

That messianic future, watched for, hoped for, did not come to be without causing certain fleeting glimpses, foretastes, of the Day of Yahweh, that is, of the final moment of this present world when God, holding solemn court, will reveal His justice decisively against every accusation cast up at Him by the impious: indifference to the lot of the just, complicity with those in power. On that Day He will make it clear that the course of the world had been governed with attentive condescension.

Humanity has already had some experience of the Day of Yahweh, partial, it is true, but intended to strengthen the oppressed faithful and to restrain tyrants. There was messianic hope in the prophetic explosions of Ezekiel or Isaiah, in the vocation of Abraham and Moses. The Day of Yahweh shone upon Sennacherib, on the Nebuchadnezzar of the book of Daniel, on the Epiphany; better yet, on the kings of Israel and Judah, on Samaria, on Jerusalem and on her Temple.

Now, whenever the messianic hope manifested itself, it always made life difficult for institutions. Over the ruins of the Temple there echoed the oracles of Jeremiah and of Ezekiel, throwing light on the catastrophe by exposing its cause: the disgust of Yahweh for a house profaned, and by its own worshipers. When Yahweh appears, the earth trembles, the mountains catch fire; the messianic reality always entails an institutional earthquake. If the "new canticle" is to be chanted, the old trimmings must go. The first Christians were imbued with this theology of renewal by substitution. They believed in a progress in religion; they allied themselves with the prophets, harbingers of the Nazarene revolution. It was by the experience of those earlier seers that they ac-

counted for the defection of their own religious leaders in the days of Jesus.

VIII

THE first Christians found it natural that the guardians of the established order should repay God's legates with contradiction, exile, and death. Such is the meaning of Stephen's apostrophe to the Sanhedrin.

For them, the execution of Jesus found its place in the list of the murders of prophets. He had underlined the point Himself: It cannot be that a prophet perish, outside Jerusalem (Lk 13:33). His end in blood was dyed with the messianic vision. For the evangelists, it fit into the frame of sacred history. Because He was the Messiah, it was that history's climax, but the drama of Calvary had been preceded by rehearsals without number.

What motives peculiar to the epoch led the leaders among the Jews to rid themselves of Jesus? First of all their conservatism, their exaggerated veneration of the Temple, the visible—indeed too visible—center of their religion. The casting out of the money-changers and the jobbers in sacred cattle struck them as an aggression not to be borne. For the same reason Pashhur maltreated Jeremiah and the priest at the sanctuary of Bethel denounced Amos: they prefigure Caiaphas (Jer 20:1-2; Am 7:10-13). And the politicians, no less than the priests, were suspicious of prophets: their freedom of language was insupportable. The king's men had been suspicious of the defeatist Jeremiah, Isaiah had had small success at court; so Herod Antipas could hardly be fond of the Man who picked up where John the Baptist left off and who dealt with him as with a fox or jackal (Lk 13:31-32). This leaves, then, the scribes, the doctors of the Law: why should Jesus have interested them? The Gospels depict the jealousy of these masters smitten with their own teaching, the stubbornness of these professors who were prisoners of their own scholasticism, the impercipient of these pedants riveted to the letter. And one thing leading to another, there is their bad faith, sprung from a corporate self-love wounded to the quick by the success of this young rabbi, His victorious repartee, His stinging rebukes. None of this can be rejected a priori, for has it not all found its place again in the course of our religion since Jesus Christ? Just reread the examination of Joan of Arc.

But the Gospels also reveal to us Jesus' hostility to His contradictors. No doubt it was a loving hostility, both toward the humble whom they exploited and toward those doctors themselves whose ignorant conceit He arraigned. The rabbis' hatred, then, was not completely gratuitous—*if* there be any reason to hate him who rebukes us in the name of God, whether he be a shepherd like Amos or a child like Samuel.

Among these savage enemies, the evangelists especially denounced the Pharisees. Yet they furnished the best and the most spectacular recruits to the gospel; not to speak of Nicodemus or of Paul of Tarsus, let us mention the moving episode of the enthusiastic scribe which St. Mark reports: "Well answered, Master," he said to Jesus, whom he had questioned as to the first among the commandments. "You have said truly that God is one and there is no other besides Him; and that He should be loved with the whole heart, and with the whole understanding, and with the whole soul, and with one's whole strength; and that to love one's neighbor as oneself is a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices. And Jesus, seeing that he had answered wisely, said to him: You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk 12: 32-34).

This is the way to grasp the secret of the antagonism which set Jesus in opposition to the Pharisees. In our own days the Jews who read the Gospels are still struck by the consonance between the sayings of Jesus and the teaching of the Pharisees. If it were at all possible to consent to situate this matchless Doctor in some one of the sects of His time, it would assuredly not be in that of the Sadducees nor in that of the Essenes, such as the Dead Sea documents describe to us. He would be rather a Pharisee in the sense in which our scribe speaks, that is to say, of a party which puts religion above everything and incarnates it in the Law received from God, burns the midnight oil in study in order to understand and practice it better. To that end they sought, without ever succeeding, to soften its archaic literalism by casuistry. Still, they represented what was most elevated in the religious ideal of Israel—with this reservation: they had a shade too much suspicion that this might be the case.

It was not on the ground of zeal that Jesus condemned them; the Law was the common ground on which the Nazarene and Pharisees met. He seemed to speak of it as they did; His sentences had for them a familiar ring; they were on the point of acquiescing in a doctrine

which sounded like their own. Suddenly the spell was shattered. The kingdom of God—the expression comes from Daniel—was evoked as the fulfillment of the Law and as that without which all justice fades. Jesus introduced a new value, an irresistible ferment. No, the enemies of this Prophet cannot be reproached for having failed to measure precisely the danger into which He put their schools. Their institutions, like the Temple in the time of Jeremiah and thanks to Jeremiah, were indeed in jeopardy.

From the Pharisees to pharisaism is more than just a step. It was pharisaism which killed Jesus. But pharisaism is to the authentic Pharisees no more than a caricature: if it resembles them, it deforms them. It was a betrayal of the pharisaic ideal, the hypertrophy of their love for the Law. Strictly speaking, this infection is a disease peculiar to biblical monotheism and its requirements. From the first day, biblical monotheism insisted on a service of God which is interior and based on faith and love. The external panoply of religion is subordinated to the precept of charity. Ceremonies, if the heart is not in them, are an empty show, a denial of the rights of Godhead. Pharisaism, however, contents itself with the exterior of things and prefers it to the interior. The gesture, the posture, take precedence over conscience. Any Pharisee who keeps his blood cool will admit the existence of this disease.

Pharisaism is the resolve to make two compartments in one's life: that of egotism and sin, and that of religious observance—and to the first it gives the keys of the city. It is the contrary of the biblical religion proclaimed by Jesus and by the Doctor of the Law in their splendid duo (Mk 12:28-34). Pharisaism it is which inspires the "pious" man who is cunning in business, machiavellian in politics, who ruins his rivals but founds a monastery to shelter his mortal remains and arranges Masses for the repose of his soul. Compromise and departmentalization block the capture of the whole of his heart by divine love.

Thus understood, pharisaism is eternal. It prompted the reply of Cain: Am I my brother's keeper? (Gen 4:9) and the deliberators of the petty council which deposed Chrysostom. They reproached him with the innovation of ablutions after the Eucharist but carefully kept silence on their own servile desire to humor the Empress: frauds who invoke the God they dishonor.

Jesus perished a victim of pharisaism. The freethinker Caiphias was

in it with the plotters. He permitted himself to be recruited, along with the Sadducees, by those among the scribes who confounded religious conventions with the religion of the living God. They declared against Him a treacherous, a clerical, a "no quarter" war; their cabal reached its goal in the sentence of Pilate.

IX

THE death of Jesus, like the death of Joan of Arc, was a crime of the learned, a crime of clerks. They perpetrated it because they lacked spiritual hunger, considering themselves well stocked with erudition and authority, whereas in fact they were drowning in the incuriosity native to offices and schools. Jesus was a formidable adversary, but they did not sense that His strength came to Him because He was right in His opposition to them and because the Spirit of God dwelt within Him. Their professorial assurance concealed from them the laws of divine action in the world. They have their place in the file of those blind opponents which sacred history lists, "from the blood of Abel the just, even unto the blood of Zachariah" (Mt 23:35).

That murder was a political blunder. Gamaliel saw it clearly: If Jesus were no more than a knave or a visionary, to put Him to death was to create a martyr; better to bury Him in indifference, for every heretic suppressed by violence becomes the founder of a line. It was the misfortune of the Sanhedrin that He was the Just One and that He rose again.

The burning of the Temple by Titus wrought an amputation on the Jewish body; astoundingly, contrary to all expectation, it survived. But at that moment the catastrophe of 71 and then the pitiless war of 135 appeared to be the definitive liquidation of a great past, that centuries-old Covenant inaugurated with Abraham. Neither Jews nor Christians, both committed to the doctrine of providence, could believe it a chance event. For the Nazarenes, it was the "Day of Jesus" which He had foretold to Caiphas; for the Jews, it was a new ordeal, an invitation to enter once more into favor with God. But how? We now know by experience that the ruin of Solomon's building was a spiritual deliverance for both stages of the biblical religion: the disciples of Jesus were set free from a past which was august but an encumbrance; their con-

tradictors were relieved of a cult which had finally become impossible, and they proceeded to draw new resources from the study of the Law. The Synagogue consolidated itself.

But the leaders of the Jews had committed a fault which was grievous in another order: it was a moral failure. They had used spiritual weapons against Jesus. Terrible for those whom they strike, they are full of peril for those who wield them. They paralyze the judgment of the faithful; what they create cannot be withdrawn. These condemnations, even if they thunder forth out of conviction, have this awkward consequence: they re-echo down the centuries with no possibility of appeal; they come forth, as it were, from the tribunal of God. How conscious St. Paul was of the gravity of his step in excommunicating the incestuous Corinthian! And rightly so; that peremptory sentence has outlived his contemporaries; that nameless figure is still for us "the incestuous Corinthian." Did he repent? Did he end as a martyr? Until the Last Judgment we shall know him only in the character which the Apostle has left him. It is difficult to lift the weight of even an unjust religious condemnation—the case of Joan of Arc is an exception. Once formally pronounced, the faithful, if they belong to the entourage of the one condemned, bear it with an ulcerating resignation; if they are outsiders, with an indifference which gives consent. Presumption works in favor of authority: this is why there will be a Last Judgment.

For the future of the religion of the Bible, the decision of Jewish officialdom was a misfortune of incalculable scope. It has bent the course of history as much as the sin of Adam or the episode of the Golden Calf. The headlong act of a few impassioned men staked the destiny of their people on a throw of the dice, just as the incapacity of a general sweeps an army into the horrors of a rout. From generation to generation the possibility of finding again the common path which leads to God has been lost. The Jewish people has been defrauded of its heritage by the rancor of priests and scribes obsessed with their own doctrinaire point of view. The sentence of the Sanhedrin blocks to the Jews the avenues which would lead them to Jesus Christ; it stiffens them in their refusal. How will they disengage themselves? (I speak of the mass, not of a few exceptions.) What curiosity will drive them to review the trial? They would have to beget doubts which to them would already smell of apostasy. And besides, what sources of investi-

gation can they consult? To form an opinion, a Jew has at his disposal nothing but the Gospel accounts; how should he not consider their witness partisan?

But there is still the lesson of the Nazarene triumph. It fills the world; it fills history. The Synagogue opposes it with silence; Talmud and Midrash maintain a silence which is absolute or nearly so on the Nazarene doctrine. Clinging to their own opinions, if you like, but not without logic. The fact of Christ is not acknowledged; the messianic hope must be preserved after as before Jesus. With its own hands, Israel has built its ghetto, given up this present world where its innumerable gifts invite it to play an important part. Over the ruins of the Temple, the Jewish people, unyielding, makes its prayer.

As for Christians, sometimes Jews think of them with bitterness as of false brethren who have supplanted Israel and ravaged the vine of Jacob. Since Constantine Jews have become the guest of Christendom as previously they had been that of the pagan empires. We should like to think the shadow of the Cross gracious to them, we should like to think that it had never weighed arbitrarily on their shoulders. For that, we should have to set aside the memory of pogroms, of so many vexatious measures, of a violent, fanatical proselytism. Even St. Paul dreaded that lack of consideration on the part of the pagans substituted for those Jews (who had not believed). Together with the spectacle of the schisms which tear Christians apart, the memory of a thousand outrages has turned Israel from the Way of salvation for all.

Those among them whom the grace of the Master has conquered lose no time in testifying that it is Scripture which has made them understand that ignominious death in which their nation consented. They have seen it as the paschal sacrifice of the Servant without peer, who took the place of the prophetic lamb. That death crowns the traditional series of bloody sacrifices which it terminates by bringing them to completion, and the ruin of the Temple bears out this vision. As for the shame of the punishment, Jesus explained it to the Emmaus disciples by invoking the Scriptures: "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into His glory?" (Lk 24:26). This is the Christian philosophy of history; let us treasure these insights lest we fall into mere anecdote. The executioners are less important than the laws which presided at that execution, so profitable for the entire world. It is true that egotism, a religious and nationalist egotism, contrary to

the spirit if not to the letter of the Scriptures, animated those assassins, but they were no monsters: we resemble them only too much.

X

AN old rabbi leaning out of his window muses: "The Messiah has come? I see no change." But Rabbi, remember the countryside we saw from Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Fifteen leagues away, in every direction, the gods of the nations flaunted their might. As the prophets had foretold, they were swept away. Was this thanks to Jews who remained simply Jews or thanks to Jews who had become Christians? Is this no change? Let us praise God for it, the God who, that it might prophesy, opened the mouth of Balaam's ass—at least we can be ranked with that holy beast.

Jesus Christ may divide us, but in our very quarrel He unites us. Since His coming, traditional Judaism is no longer what it was. It survives without Temple, without sacrifice, and that in a splendid fashion, giving proof of a religious vitality impossible not to acknowledge. The Jews carry on their case against us with the same energy they employ to maintain the past—our past—with an eye to the future. All we fear is that they might relax their effort. The temptation is older than yesterday. The Hellenizers apostasized to ape pagan customs, the marranos of Spain sought to implant themselves in a Christian world from which they remained detached at heart. Since their emancipation, the children of Israel have undergone the nationalist allurements of assimilation.

This would be the surrender of their peculiar greatness, which remains the quest for the Messiah. We have an interest in this. The trial of Christ can end only with the victory of the divine Legate, not with the collapse of one party. The Jewish hope complements the Christian. When "He" returns to call the roll of His own, the children of Abraham according to the flesh must not miss the mustering because they have abandoned the faith of their ancestor.

As to the Christians: they must not sleep in the possession of privileges which they have received only in default of those who held them by right. Theirs to maintain the nostalgia for salvation in their elder brothers, treating them with the deference due pioneers, believers whose very downfall stems from zeal.

"Jesus," said Pascal, "will be in agony while the world lasts: we must not sleep the while."² Thus for centuries to come we must expect contestation. Jesus is in agony, that is to say, He is in the center of this struggle, and there is only one way we can defend Him: to radiate around us a love so great, a love so pure and selfless, that Israel will at long last be enraptured because it has truly found among us the highest fulfillment of the Law's one commandment: "Love God and your neighbor."

The trial of the Christ continues. It forbids us to sleep.

2. Cf. the bilingual edition of Pascal's *Pensées*, trans. H. F. Stewart (New York: Pantheon Books, 1950), p. 367.