

**JESUS is wall-destroyer, wall, gate, & bridge****MESSIAH WITHOUT REMAINDER?**

An incubus hangs over human life, a dark cloud that can be lifted only by God's suffering for us & our penitent joyful acceptance of the divine mercy. These three terms of biblical religion lie behind & within the Jewish Day of Atonement & the Christian Seasons of Penitence (Advent & Lent).

Look at the three terms:

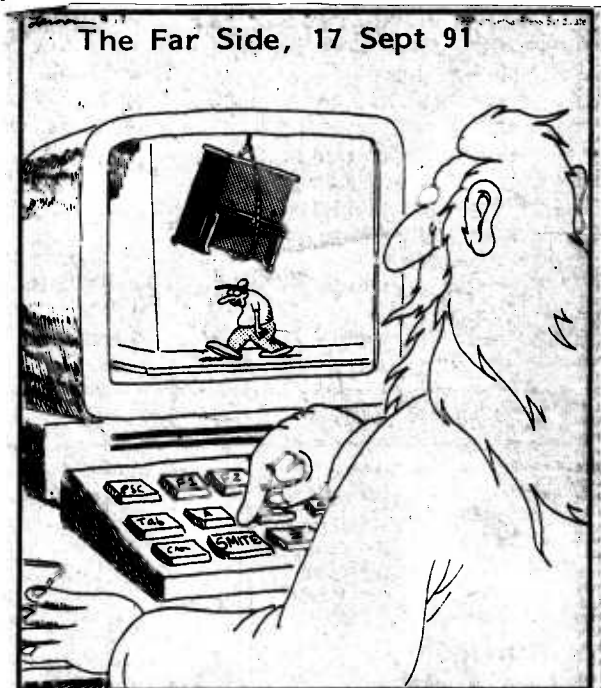
(1) Many people live without any sense of cosmic threat. If they believe in God at all, they don't believe he has a "SMITE" key on his computer. To them, the biblical (Jewish & Christian) doctrines of atonement are irrelevant. Not that they never experience dread, a feeling common to humanity. But they never connect their dread-experiences to the divine-human encounter, & seldom connect them as ethical-moral signals as to their behavior. For them, phrases such as "the wrath of God" & "the anger of the Almighty" are worse than useless.

Here we have to do with the first of the triune mysteries--evil, good, & love--that make up the impenetrable substructure & substance of our lives. Impenetrable without divine aid. Thus "the three basic themes of Jewish theology: Creation, Revelation, Redemption" (p.196, GATES OF UNDERSTANDING, ed. by Lawrence A. Hoffman, CCAR/UHHC/77).

Both beyond & by our own wills, we are involved in all three mysteries. We may choose to engage in the second & third against the first. But for this engagement, we--again--need divine aid.

(2) The second term, "God's suffering for us," is the cosmic promise set over against the cosmic threat. "**Atonement**" is one umbrella word for the process of the working out of this promise. Subordinate words are "propitiation" (directed to God) & "expiation" (directed to our sins) & "sacrifice" (the means within the process; suspect by the prophets as tempting to impersonal magic as an idolatrous substitute for self-giving to God; brought to completion by God's own action in the Suffering Servant [Is.53.10; Jn.3.16; 2Cor.5.19; cf. Gn.22.8, Jn.1.29, 1Jn.4.10].)

(3) The third term, "our penitent joyful acceptance of the divine mercy," calls to mind the other umbrella word for the process of our deliverance, viz "**Redemption**" (the Hebrew *geulah* is an abstract from *goel*, "redeemer"). Acceptance is the second stage; the first is access, the access of grace-forgiveness. This access does not come cheap for God or for us. Since today is Yom Kippur, the Jewish calendar's most solemn day, I've been reading Jews on it. What God wants is not "the death of the wicked" but their repentance (Hebrew, "turning"): Eze.33. 11. The turning includes *kapparah* ("ransom," "compensation," "atonement," &--increasingly throughout Jewish history--contrition, heartfelt repentance more than outward acts [Mic.6.6-8; Hos.14.2], + the appropriate change of conduct.) (See esp. Chaim Stern's GATES OF REPENTANCE and GATES OF FORGIVENESS [both, CCAR; GR, '78; GF, '80].)



God at his computer

1 If we Christians hope Jews will think about Jesus on Christmas & Easter, we should think about Jews, Judaism, Jewish-Christian relations, during the Jewish High Holy Days. I hope God is pleased with the stab I make at it, including this Thinksheet. We are, in worldview & hope, closer to each other than either is to any other religion. Gabriele Boccaccini is right: We are "the two Judaisms of modern times" (MIDDLE JUDAISM: JEWISH THOUGHT, 300 B.C.E.-

What do we two have in common (1) with others & (2) with each other? First, with others: we share with the Samaritans, whose Pentateuch I held in my arms on one occasion, basic Torah, "Moses"; & with Muslims, the OT (though for them it's of a revelational level inferior to "Muhammed"). And with each other? The OT (their "the Hebrew Scriptures"), the gathered community (*qahal*-congregation-synagogue, our *ecclesia*-church), the theocentric-ethical worldview, & the man Jesus the Jew.

Dialog between us requires mutual humility (modesty, penitence, willingness if not eagerness to listen as well as speak) & honesty (emotional as well as intellectual). For us both, the governing question must be *What will please God?*

2 It will **displease** God if we make polluting additions to his revelation: this is the purity sanction. Here's how it works in....

....LITERATURE: The Samaritans say the Jews--then the Christians, then the Muslims--polluted Torah by adding scriptures (sequentially, The Prophets, The Writings, NT, Koran) to Gn.-Deut. Jews say we Christians polluted Torah by adding NT. Jews & Christians say Muslims polluted Torah by adding the Koran; & that Mormons did it by adding the Book of Mormon & the Pearl of Great Price; & that the Moonies did it by adding Divine Principle. The purity/pollution category is emotive-referential rather than the other way 'round: of the two roots of tabu, feeling is deeper than ritualized idea.

Dialog requires bald statement here: For Jews, "the [Christian] Bible" is the Hebrew Bible + a worse than unnecessary addition, a goy-polluted sequel the Christians, in disparagement of Judaism, call "the NEW [Covenant] Testament." For Christians, the issue is not that Christians polluted Judaism with a flood of gentile feelings, ideas, & practices, but rather that Jews impoverished themselves by sealing up Torah short of Jesus Messiah-Christ-Lord-Savior (as the Samaritans had sealed up Torah before The Prophets). When it's put so starkly, & the dialog is overlaid with the ultimate question which dis/pleases God (more), some believe that true dialog between Christians & Jews is impossible. Me, I hold that it is only highly unlikely; but it's not the only highly unlikely thing I pray for.

....DOCTRINE: Assuming as I do that nonpolluting additions can be made (from the other religions, from modernity, from postmodernity) to biblical religion, Jewish & Christian, I'll mention a now widely-made addition that is polluting, viz goddesses or (worse) the Goddess. The boys invented goddesses/the Goddess in order to keep the girls in line, socked into their sexual role-assignments, their prescribed physical-cultural-social tasks, viz fertility & nurturance. Thus, before & outside of biblical monotheism, was the divine sanction used to keep women in a subordinate position. The Bible's total reevaluation of the polytheistic worldview destroyed the neat as-in-heaven-so-on-earth male-female dualism, opening up an egalitarian view of human nature & society: women could no longer be considered inherently, naturally, inferior (though of course the Bible ended before all the issues of gender & sexuality got surfaced & settled).

Did I think this all up? I wish I had! Don't blame or credit me for it, a woman did it, a Jew, a prominent scholar of ancient Near Eastern religion (a prof. at Philadelphia's Reconstructionist Rabbinical Institute), Tikva Frymer-Kensky (IN THE WAKE OF THE CODESSES: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth [The Free Press/91]). (Rightly, she says that Hellenistic misogyny somewhat polluted the early development of both Jews & Christians, & we should teach appropriate correctives. I add that it will displease God if we don't make those correctives.)

3 Now note, please, the second line of this Thinksheet's title. My four metaphors on how Jesus functions "between Christians & Jews" need little explication. He's a wall-destroyer (Eph.2.14f: "With his own body he broke down the wall that separated them"; "Christ has brought us peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people....in union with himself"; for all of which he had to "abolish the Jewish Law"; v.18: "It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in one Spirit into the presence of the Father." This is straight supersessionism: they were, we (Christians) are. We Christians are, as a

Christian leader soon after the NT was to say, "the third race," God-intended to replace Jews & Gentiles, ie the wall between them, by subsuming them both "in Christ." (Some scholars, including me, believe this is too smooth, too ideological, too free of anguish & mystery to be by the hand of Paul, whose two minds on the matter can be seen in Ro.1 versus 9-11. With Goodspeed, we put Eph. as a postPauline publisher's introduction to the letters of Paul, ca.AD/CE90. Another piece of evidence for this position is that it's lighter on verbs & heavier on nouns than what in NT is unarguably Paul. But most of NT is not by Paul, & I thank God both for what is & what isn't.)

Second, Jesus is a wall between us. I speak of the Jesus of us Christians, the Jesus of NT, the only Jesus we have, the so-called "historical Jesus" being always a tendentious construct (as we haven't enough "facts" to do a modern-style biography). On the Jewish side of the wall, Christians are seen as having abandoned monotheism for ditheism (Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity), even tritheism (the Trinity). Blasphemy! On the Christian side, Jews are seen as having denied the Incarnation, that in Jesus God has come to us as a human being "to share our common lot"--a blasphemous denial of the completion of Torah. Mark dialog "Hopeless." But the more we know of the ancient Mediterranean world in general & of its Jewish & Christian literature in particular, the thinner the wall gets. Mark dialog "Somewhat hopeful."

Third, Jesus is a gate between us, a gate whose arch bears the single word "Jesus." There are conversions in both directions. Some persons have gone through the wall twice--a Christian becoming a Jew, then returning to Christianity; a Jew becoming a Christian, then returning to Judaism. Walter Ziffen is an instance of the latter. (My reff. are to his THE TEACHING OF DISDAIN: An Examination of Christology and New Testament Attitudes Toward Judaism [Or Chadash: Walter Ziffen, Orrington, ME]).

Converting to Christianity, Ziffen became a Christian professor of theology, his occupation for many years. "I do not regret having been a Christian for over thirty years" (p.262). Then, mainly through the influence of a Jewish scholar whose PhD in the Gospels was from a Christian school--Sam. Sandmel--Ziffen converted back to Judaism; & this privately-personally published book is his apologia for going through the Jesus gate a second time.

Here's a taste of it, with a bit of commentary by me:

Jesus' death was "the sole responsibility of the Romans and not the Jews as the Gospels suggest" (cover-p.4). Our information is insufficient to exculpate entirely the Jewish authorities. The fact that the Gss. accuse them does not in itself excuse them. FACT: Jesus at least worried the Jewish authorities even if he didn't enrage them into accusing him to the Roman authorities. Gospels' evidence is all we have, & Ziffen is too eager to reject it: his antiantisemitic bias is showing.

"Antisemitism is nineteen centuries old" (cover-p.4). Older than that: it's preChristian, & Christians took it in with their pagan-mothers' milk, then added their own twist to it. It's just as foul-play to imply that we Christians invented antisemitism as it is to say that the Jews killed Jesus.

"Anti-Jewishness is an illusion of the malignant kind that, if not promptly treated, metastasizes into a rapidly spreading cancer called anti-Semitism" (p.xx). Well-said.

On p.xix is an instance of anti-Christian venom: "anti-Jewish/Semitic venom in the Gospels." In the Gss. there's some anti-Jewish sentiment, but nothing that meets his own definition of anti-Semitic, an intellectual intensification of anti-Jewish. Further, "venom" is too strong. In NT, anti-Jewishness is passive, not poisonous: there's only enough of it to make room for & sense of emergent Christianity. Understandably, anti-Christian sentiments are found in some contemporary Jewish writings: the two Judaisms were twins struggling against each other in the womb. All these writings should be read, & taught, sociodynamically, with a generous spirit & in full historical context. The suggestion that such texts should have their polemic bowdlerized out of them is antihistorical & dishonest. How both handle questions of origin should be governed not only by compassionate goodwill

but also by intelligence & integrity.

Traditional Christology, "if kept unmodified, remains a potential source of anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic attitudes" (xiii). Of course it does, just as what Jews teach their children remains a potential source of anti-Christian attitudes. What does the author think we Christians should do about it? Throw orthodox Christology overboard, that's what! This part of the book is more a description of what this ex-Christian did, though written in the vein of prescription as to what we Christians who haven't converted to Judaism should do. "Beware the convert [whose zeal may nail you]!" is an old stoic saying. In Ziffen's case, beware the double convert!

Finally, this triumphalist note: the author has not just left Christianity, but wiped it out! "What...remains of the traditional Jesus, Lord, Savior, Messiah, etc., whose uniqueness has been taught to every Christian from his or her infancy?" News to you, Bro. Z.: everything remains. Your polemic house of cards rests on the shaky all-or-nothing premise that we Christians claim a zero-sum uniqueness for Jesus, every Jewish or pagan contemporary parallel with him chipping away at this uniqueness till--if at least one parallel is found for each Christian claim about Jesus--nothing is left. Rather, consider: (1) The unparalleled is incomprehensible & thus incommunicable. What sense, eg, would "Lord Jesus" make in a lordless world, esp. a world in which no functionary claimed total lordship ("Lord Caesar")? The reverse of your thesis is true: In America, which is "lord"less, it takes a special effort to train the Christian troops to say "Lord Jesus": his cultural uniqueness as "Lord" is a burden, not an advantage. (2) No sane person could deny the uniqueness of the one who in life & death & afterlife drew to himself, as a magnet iron filings, all the adulative titles in the complex civilization of his time (here your "etc." is interesting). As for your title, THE TEACHING OF DISDAIN, I do not teach disdain for Judaism, as you do for Christianity.

Fourth, Jesus can be a bridge between us. Can be: in the case of wall-destroyer, wall, & gate, I said "is." Whatever hope there is for improved cognitive relationship between Jews & Christian depends on Jesus as bridge, as the enabling name for meeting, though the river of our division into two Judaisms continues its flow. For example, consider the title in the last line of this Think-sheet's title:

4 Christian supersessionists claim that Jesus is **Messiah** "without remainder," ie that he fulfils every phase & fragment of the Jewish messianic hope-tradition. Scholars of that tradition, no matter what their religion, agree that Jewish messianism is collectively so amorphous & particularly so divers that no one figure, human or divine, could possibly be messiah without remainder. Around Jesus' time there were some half-hundred of claimants to messiahship, none of them (including Jesus, if indeed he was one of the claimants) coming close to fulfilling all the tradition's dreams & hopes.

Now that scholarship has taught us Christian that we cannot claim Jesus as messiah without remainder, two possibilities lie before us: (1) We can amplify & enrich our traditional claim that Jesus *will be* messiah without remainder: the doctrine of "the Second Coming" (which, viewed from the outside, esp. by Jews, has always seemed logically lame & "just-you-wait" compensatory for Jesus' historical failure). (2) We can frankly admit that "Messiah" is only a somewhat fitting, which is to say also a somewhat misfitting, title for Jesus. And add that the same applies to all his other titles. Indeed, if any title had been a perfect fit for him, it would have had to be shaped not by Jewish or pagan history but custom-tailored by his followers & thus a cultural oddity. (Every title Jesus wore was ready-made, off-the-rack: the incarnation was "on our street.")

Both these possibilities have bridging values that earnest & honest dialog can surface. For us Christians, Jesus is the name (including titles, esp. "Christ" [Heb. "messiah," meaning "anointed" for special service to God in serving the people]) & the face coming to us not only out of the past but also, as "the desire of all nations," from out of the future, whose mystery however should make us modest. (Splendid, accessible art. "messiah," HARPER'S BIBLE DICTIONARY [H&R/85].)