DO JEWS NEED A SAVIOR?

IS THE GOSPEL FOR EVERYBODY, OR ONLY FOR GENTILES?

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We Christians & Jews are--my favorite metaphor for the relationship--**siblings**, with all the +s & -s pertaining thereto, all the potentials for strife & creative mutuality. Our historical parent is landed & templed Israelitism, & our lands & temples are ambiguous sections of the one will we continue to hear read & to study as two wills (the "covenants" metaphor of the Letter to the Hebrews). We have both been, & continue to be, tempted to link providence with (1) our specific community's progress (ie, how we Jews & Christians are making out in the world) & (2) world history (what's happening in the Big Picture of humankind). Our moral responses to human predicaments--personal, societal, global--are, in comparison with the world's faith-communities other than our two--almost identical, so much so that we are clearly called to present a more united front in the fight for a better world than we have shown in the past. And the paradox is coming plainer: If we are to come closer in creative mutuality & joint action, we shall have to see & confess our differences more clearly, honestly, & courageously both externally (how, within each community, we see the other community) & internally (how, within each community, we view ourselves in light of our tangency with the other community).....This Thinksheet deals with an abiding difference (the Thinksheet's title-question), then displays the different ways Christians account for Judaism-Jews vis-a-vis the Christian reality.

1 A Jewish commentary for which I have high regard--THE TORAH: A MODERN COMMENTARY, UAHC/81, pp.38f--uses the developed Christian doctrine of original sin to distinguish our two religions. The two religions agree that the Fall, through which we have "moral discrimination," made us "capable of committing sin," unable ever to return to our "former state of ethical indifference," being now "a 'choosing' creature. Two radically different theologies developed from this interpretation: Christianity, building on certain, largely sectarian Jewish teachings, taught that after Adam's transgression all men were inherently evil [thus, "'the fall of man,' an expression absent from the Bible itself and from Jewish literature"--Ro.5.12,18; New England Primer, "In Adam's fall / we sin-ned all"]." From this "original sin, a fatal flaw," we can be "redeemed only after Jesus came into the world as the Christ. Without faith in him as the redemptive savior men would live and die in their original sin." This led to "a thoroughly pessiminstic view of man and a heavy emphasis on the right kind of faith" (the Pelagians, contrarily, teaching that sin is "transmitted by bad example"). In Judaism, by contrast, "the only road to salvation was through godly deeds (*mitzvot*), rather than through belief in a savior....while man tended to corruption (Gen.6:5, 8:21), he was not basically a corrupt creature. Though he was constantly exposed to the evil impulse, by carrying out God's commandment he could overcome or at least control it and thereby could develop his impulse for good. The more closely he attended to *mitzvot*, the greater would be his protection from sin." The ethical, intellectual, & sexual interpretations of Gn.3 all have both strengths & weaknesses.

2 Since both religions make universal claims, it's impossible for either to accept the other's view of partiality. Judaism's influence is not to be parochial, for the mission is to be "a light to the nations." And Christianity cannot shrink the Savior down to only part of humanity, the gentile part. If dialog is to be honest & productive, this double impossibility must be accepted no matter how skillfully theologians on both sides may nuance the message. Jacob Neusner, eg, sees the split as so great that time & energy should not be wasted on dialog; & that is the general opinion among conservative Christians.

3 But siblings share genes: what's in one is in the other. Christianity's Savior is prefigured in Judaism's messiah- & martyr-motifs (though fully developed through gentile categories), & Judaism's godly deeds appear in Christianity as good works flowing from gratitude to God for the grace that reaches its supreme manifestation in the Savior. Judaism says we can, yet the Hebrew Bible can rightly be viewed as a midrash explaining in history, prophecy, wisdom, & song that we can with God & can't

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without: Christianity begins when one says I can't without the Savior, yet the very confession exercises the power to repent, the ability so to open oneself to the gracious influences of the Spirit as to begin a new life of godly deeds through grace. In short, the factors of ability & inability appear, though playing different roles, in both the Jewish & the Christian drama. Diametrical to §2, here we have, for approaching each other in dialog & action, a double possibility.

4 The gentiles are second in *ordo salutis*, God's process of bringing the world to shalom: Torah is **from** the Jews, & Gospel is **for** the Jews "first" (Ro.1.16; some MSS, & of course Marcion, omit "first," but all MSS have "Jews" before "Greeks [ie, gentiles]"). In the NT, the sibling paradox is real: each needs the other, & neither can preempt the other's servant role; yet each also claims to fulfil the servant role & not to need the other! The paradox is resolved on the human side in that the same God is praised & on the divine side in that God receives-accepts both (as he does both sides of the dietary difference within the earliest Roman church, Ro.14.3)....So we arrive at these tentative answers to this Thinksheet's title questions: YES, the gospel is for everybody, so Jews need a/the Savior; but the gospel in its christological shape is especially (not "only") for gentiles, its gentile shaping (the Trinity) being blasphemous to Jews, as Jewish rejection of the Savior/Trinity strikes Christians as blasphemous....The Presbyterian USA General Assembly paper "commended to the church for study and reflection" preserves the paradox by this addition during the discussion (sec.9): The "covenant established by Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8)....requires us to call *all* men and women to faith in Jesus Christ." Like the UCC General Synod statement of the same year, the Presbyterian statement rejects supersessionism (viz, Christianity as replacing Judaism); but unlike the latter, the former failed--in its original text & on the floor--to preserve the paradox, & the failure has had a fistful of baneful theological & practical consequences. The paradoxes of the NT (centrally, the Kingdom of God as come & not fullcome) express tensions essential to the Christian reality, mission, & hope; & tampering with them is sickening if not fatal to the faith & its dialog with "the world."

5 Advances in historical & literary studies make further rapprochement possible from both sides. Pinchas Lapide is one Jew working at this, & Jeffrey S. Siker is a Christian parallel. The latter's DISINHERITING THE JEWS: ABRAHAM IN EARLY CHRISTIAN CONTROVERSY (Westminster-Knox/91) shows how early Christianity moved away from its origins as a sub-group within Judaism. Paul had argued for gentile inclusion within God's promises to the Jew; but by mid-2nd-c. Christians were interpreting Abraham in a way that excluded Jews. Since this shift toward exclusivism depended more on historical contingencies than on anything inherent in Christianity, Christianity is not now at risk as it shifts again, this time toward the Jews--a penitent shift in which Paul the divider becomes Paul the reconciler. Some Israeli scholars, in their re-estimation of Jesus, are preparing the way from the Jewish side for more creative dialog with us Christians.

6 With his irenic mind & usual pithy summarizing power, Gabriel Fackre has laid out the thirteen "Perspectives on the Place of Israel in Christian Faith" (ANDOVER NEWTON REVIEW, Winter/90, pp.5-17). Without revealing his own position, he concludes "In essentials unity / In perspectives diversity / In all things charity." I'll severely abbreviate: (1) Retributive Replacement: We supercede the Jews, whom God cursed for their rejection of Jesus. (2) Non-retributive Replacement: God's act in Christ is unique, the New Covenant replacing the Old; but anti-Judaism is evil, & the State of Israel has no theological significance. (3) Modified Replacement: Common social cause between Jews & Christians, though Christ the only way of personal salvation; dialog; pro-Israel. (4) Messianic Replacement: The Jewish heritage continues valid, & converted Jews retain their Jewish identity ("Jews for Jesus," "Messianic Jews"). (5) Christological Election: Symbiotic, for God has elected one community, & "all Israel shall be saved." (6) Dispensationalism: The State of Israel shows God's love for the Jews, but they can be saved only through Jesus. (7) One People: "Jesus the Jew," solidarity with Jews. (8) Paradoxical: §4. (9) Eschatological: Christ the source of Abrahamic saving faith. (10) Double Covenant. (11) Midrashic: NT midrash on Hebrew Bible. (12) Moral Pluralism: True "for me." (13) Cultural-Linguistic: Story-determination of truth as faith, not knowledge.