

Eva Fogarasi Bálint

“WHO HAS BEWITCHED YOU?”

Galatians 3:1

**Bold Ideas about the Bible and
Christianity**

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Introduction

The three great historical churches, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox have reached a hopeless dead end in Europe. Dutiful Christians, whilst paying taxes to the congregation they belong to, are not particularly interested in either the Church as a religious institution or Christianity. Churches have been closed down or converted into concert halls, discothèques, cafes or market halls. Certain churches compete with entertainment branches by arranging spectacular concerts or other popular events.

The most frequent explanation given for this failure is secularisation or people's lack of spirituality and new spiritual needs are brought up in turn. Attempts are made to reverse this trend by introducing new forms of service and spending millions on new Bible translations. But are only the exterior forms to be renewed and adapted or is there a need of a deeper change on the level of the dogmas and teachings? Is it really the "boring" organ music and the unintelligible liturgy that scares Christians away from our churches, or is it something else?

After many fruitful discussions with Christians who are more or less loyal to the church, I have reached the conclusion that my brothers and sisters often struggle with the strange dogmas and teachings preached from the pulpit and with Bible texts that are difficult to understand. The Confused Christians are unable to handle the contradictory images of God as presented in the Old and the New Testaments. Among others the average person struggles with the following questions:

Is the Old Testament a Holy Scripture, despite it including texts where religious leaders encourage genocide and war in the name of God?

Are the Ten Commandments sanctions for all peoples and individuals?

If Jesus has taken away the sins of the world, why is there still so much evil?

If Jesus has died *for* our sins, why is he going to judge the living and the dead at the end of time?

Could not God have forgiven our sins without sacrificing his Son?

Why has so much violence, cruelty and immorality taken place in the Church of Christ?

There are no complete answers to all these questions but we all have some ideas about Heaven and Earth, God and us human beings. This book does not contain established theological truths or dogmas. It presents some non-traditional thoughts about the Bible, Christianity and God, with regards to the Old and the New Testament.

Eve's Thirst for Knowledge

If God is good and almighty, why does He permit all the suffering in the world? Is evil a part of God's creation or is it another independent power that wants to shatter the paradisiacal state of Man? The theodice problem, the question of how evil in the world can be consistent with God's existence, has been discussed at length both in philosophy and theology.

The story of Eve's Fall in the Old Testament can be considered as one of many attempts to solve the mystery of suffering and evil. According to the severe monotheist belief of the Jews, God is one and Almighty. Everything comes from God, both good and evil – even the tempter, the snake that takes advantage of the woman's weakness. Eve's sin is her curiosity as she wants to understand the nature of good and evil and therefore falls for the temptation to taste the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said,



‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

And the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3 2-6

This story originated in a strictly patriarchal society where women in general and Eve in particular were considered to be the origin of all sins in the world and it has its parallels in other cultures in the form of myths about disobedience to the gods. The people of Israel could not even dream that their simple and primitive solution to the problem of evil would have such a significance several thousand years later.

Judaism has preserved and incorporated Eve’s story in its religious philosophy in a natural way. But the including of the story into the new religion, Christianity, which was influenced by more advanced philosophical ideas like Neo-Platonism, is not as self-evident. Furthermore it is almost incomprehensible how this story, mostly considered as mythology, has been able to become the foundation for two major doctrines of Christianity: that of *Original Sin and Salvation*.

The story is well known. After the Fall Man’s relation to God is damaged. Man is driven out of the Garden of Eden and by that loses eternal life. The sin of Eve and Adam gets universal proportions as it has consequences not only for the two of them, but for all of mankind. From now on Man begins to fear God, who punishes him for breaking the rules.

How should the Fall of Eve be interpreted and understood today? Does this story answer the questions about all the evil that has befallen mankind for thousands of years? New translations of the Old Testament make it easier to understand the language of the ancient texts, but do not help to solve the difficult existential questions facing the readers.

Origenes, one of the greatest theologians of the early Christian church, says that every Bible text can be interpreted in three different ways: literally, morally and allegorically/spiritually. Origenes also

says that the message of the Holy Scripture is hidden from the ordinary reader. No matter which of Origenes' interpretations we choose, a person without a theological background is entirely unable to understand God's revengeful attitude towards Adam and Eve who tasted the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

To the woman he said:

*"I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Your desire shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."*

Then to Adam he said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it:

*"Cursed is the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat from it
All the days of your life "*

Genesis 3:16-17

Christianity has made use of these texts for wording the doctrine of the Salvation from the Original Sin despite the fact that Jesus never mentioned the story of Eve. The concept *original sin* is used for the first time by St Augustine in the 5th c. A.D. He wanted to show that Man could not reach salvation on his own, but depended on the help of God.

When Jesus talks of sin, forgiveness and righteousness he does not refer to the stories of the Torah (the five books of Moses) that were mostly known to the Jews. Jesus uses parables from everyday life because his message is directed not only to the Pharisees, scribes and Jews but to all peoples. He was aware that he was moving about and talking to a pluralistic society including people of different background and religion. Not even when he is invited to the home of a Pharisee does he diverge from his simple, direct way of telling parables. The story about the sinful woman and the parable about a creditor who had two debtors show Jesus' way of thinking about sin and forgiveness:

“There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him more?”

Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one to whom he forgave more.”

And he said to him, “You have rightly judged.”

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.

You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in.

You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil.

Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

And those who sat at the table with him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Then he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Luke 7:40-50

Jesus does not use curses or profane language as is customary in the Old Testament. Neither does he formulate doctrines that are difficult to understand, the way Christian theologians have done during 2000 years. He uses the simple universal language of love. There are, however, attempts in the New Testament, especially in the gospel according to Matthew, to put words, expressions and statements into Jesus' mouth that give the impression that he teaches a strict, punitive and condemning God. A closer reading of these texts however makes us understand that they in many ways contradict Jesus' basic message about the compassionate and loving Father by whom he is sent to forgive sins and to combat evil.

According to Jesus the demons belong to another world. Jesus' view of life is dualistic and has more in common with Zoroastrianism than

with a strictly monotheistic, Judaic way of thinking. According to Zoroastrianism Creation had been perfect until Ahriman, the evil spirit, one day destroyed the paradisiacal state of Man. Ahriman was unsuccessful at first, but later with the help of Dzsehi who was considered to be the representative of female uncleanness, he succeeded to lay heavy burdens on Man and the Ox. This story is quite similar to that of Eve's Fall, yet it differs from it on one major point. Here it is the evil Ahriman and not the good spirit Ahura Mazda that lays a burden on Man, while in the Old Testament it is God who punishes Adam and Eve.

Jesus made a definite distinction between God's good deeds and the bad work of the evil spirit. The following dispute with the Jews reflects Jesus' opinion in this matter clearly:

And he was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marvelled.

But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

And others, testing him, sought from him a sign from heaven.

But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.

If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub.....

But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Luke 11: 14...20

There were theologians in the second century who pointed out the discrepancy between the image of God in the Old Testament and the one Jesus had been teaching. It is known that Markion fought for renewal by trying to take away certain texts from the Old Testament but he was branded a heretic. It was unthinkable to remove anything from the books of the Torah.

To incorporate the Torah into the new religion must have been an ecclesiastic-political necessity as a great part of the first Christians

were of Jewish origin. It seems that a group of theologians, among others the evangelists Matthew and Luke, as well as the former Pharisee, Paul together with other writers of epistles, tried hardest to unite the old and the new religion. Many of their ideas have been put into Jesus' mouth even if they contradicted his teachings. For example Paul, influenced by his old Jewish religion, uses the story of the Fall to word his own teaching about sin, justification by faith and salvation. In his epistle to the Romans he says:

...as through one man's offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Romans 5: 18-19

Paul's idea is that as the disobedience of one person, Eve has caused the condemnation of all mankind, the obedience of one man, Jesus, who accepted suffering and crucifixion, will make many people righteous and redeemed. This might seem logical but it is a much too simplified solution to the problem of sin and evil.

Christian theologians have an ambivalent attitude to the story of Adam and Eve. They either wish to give it a symbolical interpretation, or use it word for word especially when talking about original sin. In the **Confession of the Swedish Church** for example you can read that *"after the fall of Adam all human beings born in a natural way are born with sin, that is without fear of God, without trusting God as well as with evil desires, and that this ailment or original sin is indeed a sin that brings judgement and eternal death even now to those who are not born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit."* (free translation from the **Confession of the Swedish Church**, the most distinguished doctrines: II Of Original Sin)

Doctrines of this kind confuse a Christian of today, as the hostile way of thinking about the human being does not fit with Jesus' love of mankind.

The Crime of Cain

“Why has the world become so evil and how can Man be so cruel?” – is the question we ask ourselves when the media keep reporting local, regional or global acts of violence that cost many lives.

The texts of the Old Testament, especially those of a historical character, show that murder and acts of terrorism have always been a part of the history of mankind. Shortly after the expulsion of Eve and Adam from Paradise, the first “terrorist attack” is committed when Cain, their son, kills his brother Abel. Through the Fall of Adam and Eve, Man’s relationship with God has already been spoilt and now Cain’s terrible deed endangers the relationship between human beings.

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but he did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?

If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”

Now Cain talked to Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him.

Genesis 4:3-8

The fatal conflict between the two brothers was most probably caused by envy but it might have been a case of emergency as in ancient times it was common to sacrifice animals or even humans in

order to save the fertility of the earth or if the harvest was threatened by drought or some other natural catastrophe.

According to a Jewish legend Cain was not the son of Adam, but of the Satan-angel Sammael with whom Eve had had an “affair” before her relationship with Adam. Therefore Cain did not inherit his disposition to murder from Adam, but from Sammael, who, on his part, had been sent by God to tempt Eve. Also, it was God who rejected Cain’s offering and thus awakened his anger. This way Cain is freed from guilt, as the events that took place were the will of God.

Reference to God in all kinds of contexts – whether individual vengeance, genocide, war or other crimes – run like a red thread through the Old Testament.

Moses, David and other kings and leaders commit terrible acts in the name of God. Cain’s vindictiveness, ambitiousness, enviousness and impulsivity are a recurring pattern in the history of mankind and, in a certain theological context, are even considered as a self-evident part of God’s plan.

The Bible does not tell us much about Abel, except that he is a victim, but at the same time we understand that his boasting and provocative words had made Cain furious to such an extent that he finally committed the crime. The Christian tradition presents Abel as a nice and good person, whose offering pleases God, while Cain is regarded as the sinful criminal, although he expresses his regret by saying “*My punishment is greater than I can bear*” *Genesis 4:13*.

What is Jesus’ opinion of the good ones on one hand and the bad ones on the other? Let a story from the gospel according to Luke answer the question:

Also he spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:9-14

People like Cain and the tax collector should not escape responsibility for their deeds. Crime is crime, murder is murder under all circumstances. The Christian teaching according to which everything is forgiven through Christ's death, can make Man's conscience passive. Jesus purpose was not to have spiritual cripples as disciples. On the contrary, he emphasized qualities like conscience, remorse and responsibility. He did not mention anything about "free" forgiveness through a bloody sacrifice; he only talked about a tax collector, who "*standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'*"

The meaning of Christ's life on earth was not to *die for* men's sin but to try to *prevent* it by spreading faith and love. He did not die *for*, but rather *because of* the Cainists' sins. It was Paul, the apostle who invented the teaching about Jesus' vicarious death for the sinners. Paul, the former Pharisee, felt guilty for his own acts of crime against Christians of the early Church. He himself gives an account of having persecuted the first Christians. According to his Judaic tradition Man's guilt and sin could only be redeemed by a sacrifice. The Temple of Jerusalem was a place of worship where thousands of animals were slaughtered as sacrificial offerings. This time Paul reverses the rules and says that now it is God who sacrifices his son for the sins of the Cainists. In this way God becomes the perpetrator on Golgotha.

Many Christians and non-Christians alike consider believing in a God who sacrifices his own son a remnant from old, primitive religions, in which gods used to sacrifice their children. They reject this negative image of God and prefer to believe in Jesus' teaching about

Salvation as it is written in the gospel according to *John, 3:16*, where the Master says:

*“For God so loved the world that He **gave** His only begotten son, so that **whoever believes** in Him should not perish, but **have everlasting life.**”*

In this Bible text, also called the *Little Gospel*, there is nothing mentioned about sin or a redeeming bloody sacrifice that God needed in order to reconcile himself with us humans and with our world. God, the Father about whom Jesus talks, loves His creation without being dependent on any kind of sacrifice. He *gives* his son as a gift to our world with the purpose that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish but have *everlasting life*.

Are We “Descendants” of Noah or of Utanapishtim?

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in his heart.

So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

Genesis 6: 5-8

Christian churches use this story when teaching children and young people about the good and merciful God who spared Noah’s life. The children learn that all those who died in the Great Flood deserved their punishment, as they were sinners.

According to researchers the rivers Tigris and Euphrates overflowed their banks some time during Antiquity. In 1928 a three meter deep, compact layer of clay was found during archaeological excavations near the Chaldean town of Ur in southern Mesopotamia. First it was thought to be one of the earlier river – beds of the Euphrates, but later, as work progressed, traces of an early civilisation were found. Researchers have concluded that a large flood, maybe the one described in the Old Testament and even mentioned in other ancient writings, had caused the catastrophe.

And God said to Noah.....

*And behold, I myself am bringing the flood of waters on the earth,
to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life;
and everything that is on the earth shall die.*

Genesis 6: 13...17

Another text, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* provides us with knowledge about ancient Mesopotamia and it also gives an account of a flood in a way that resembles the one we can read about in *Genesis*.

Utanapishtim happened to be behind the wall to which Ea (Ninshiku – “the Clever Prince”) told the secret of the intention of the gods to “inflict the Flood”:

*Utanapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:
“I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden,
a secret of the gods I will tell you!
Shuruppak, a city that you surely know,
Situated on the banks of the Euphrates,
That city was very old, and there were gods inside it.
The hearts of the Great Gods moved them to inflict the Flood.*

.....

*Ea, the Clever Prince(?), was under oath with them
So he repeated their talk to the reed house:
‘Reed house, reed house! Wall, wall!
O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu:
Tear down the house and build a boat!
Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!
Make all living beings go up into the boat.
The boat which you are to build,
its dimensions must measure equal to each other:
its length must correspond to its width.
Roof it over like the Apsu.’*

.....

*The boat was finished by sunset.
The launching was very difficult.*

....

*Whatever I had I loaded on it:
whatever silver I had I loaded on it,
whatever gold I had I loaded on it.
All the living beings that I had I loaded on it,
I had all my kith and kin go up into the boat,
all the beasts and animals of the field and the craftsmen I had go up.’”*

Epic of Gilgamesh: Tablet XI

Even the description of the end of the flood shows similarities in the two different traditions.

So it came to pass, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made.

Then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth.

He also sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had abated from the face of the ground.

Genesis 8:6-8

Utanapishtim acts in the same way:

*“When a seventh day arrived
I sent forth a dove and released it.
The dove went off, but came back to me;
No perch was visible so it circled back to me.
I sent forth a swallow and released it.
The swallow went off, but came back to me;
No perch was visible so it circled back to me.
I sent forth a raven and released it.
The raven went off, and saw th waters slither back.
It eats, it scratches, it bobs, but does not circle back to me.
Then I sent out everything in all directions and sacrificed (a sheep).”*

Epic of Gilgamesh: Tablet XI

Utanapishtim says that the gods were shaken when they saw the consequences of their decision. They “retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu. The gods were cowering like dogs, crouching by the outer wall.” The goddess Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth and she said:

*‘How could I say evil things in the Assembly of the Gods,
ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people!
No sooner have I given birth to my dear people
than they fill the sea like so many fish!’*

Epic of Gilgamesh: Tablet XI

The LORD expresses His repentance in a similar way in *Genesis*:

*Then the LORD said in his heart,
“I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the
imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again
destroy every living thing as I have done.”*

Genesis 8: 21

God blesses Noah and his sons and enters into an alliance with them:

*Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying:
“And as for me, behold, I establish my covenant with you and with
your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with
you.....*

*Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never
again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”*

Genesis 9: 8-11

Why does the Almighty God want to establish a covenant with Man and what became of the promise that “never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth”? Many natural catastrophes have occurred since then and earthquakes, floods and tsunami are a permanent threat even in our time.

Theologians have avoided answering the question what a literal interpretation of the story of the Flood would mean. They only refer to Noah's being a pious and decent man whom God wants to rescue. It is never mentioned that at the time of the Flood there were surely many different "pious" peoples and individuals, who should have deserved to be helped and saved by God. Why only Noah? And what was the purpose of establishing the covenant with him?

As to form and content, the covenant resembles the pacts that emperors used to make with the kings of minor states. In all probability the writer of the Holy Scripture got some inspiration from a pact like that when writing about Noah. Concerning the purpose of the covenant one can suppose that it had a political background. Even in our days there are historians who believe that the descendants of Sem, the son of Noah, are the first Semitic people in the Middle East and the descendants of the other son, Ham, are the dark-skinned, mainly African peoples, while the light-skinned Europeans descend from Noah's third son, Japheth. Thus, to consider Noah to be the progenitor of all mankind could have serious historical consequences. But according to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Utanapishtim also survived the Flood and so Noah has a rival, which leaves the question "whose descendants are we?" un-answered – maybe for ever.

According to Christian teaching it is Jesus Christ who is the reason and the purpose of all God's covenants, whether they were established with Noah, Abraham or Moses. Martin Luther, for example, writes about a direct connection between God's covenant with Noah and the Salvation through Christ. He interprets the following words of Noah as a form of miraculous prophecy about the origin of the Saviour:

*Blessed be the LORD,
The God of Shem,
And may Canaan be his servant.
May God enlarge Japheth
And may he dwell
In the tents of Shem;
And may Canaan be his servant.*

Genesis 9: 26-27

It is remarkable that Martin Luther, the great reformer does not take into consideration that Noah's blessing is preceded by a curse that condemns Canaan to slavery. Neither does Martin Luther pay attention to the fact that Jesus Christ never made any statement of his descending from the true root of Shem.

Floods and other natural catastrophes have occurred in all times. Every time it happens, those who are saved express their gratitude to God, while those who are afflicted struggle with the question: "Why me?"

The Jewish-Christian teaching that everything that happens in the world – including natural catastrophes – is the work of God does not seem to be the right answer to this question. Nowadays we know that reckless cutting of the rain forests, pollution of the environment or even the position of the planets can cause natural catastrophes. The disaster of the Flood at the time of Noah and Utanapishtim had no doubt a natural explanation that was unknown to the people of the time.

Modern Man, who with the aid of archaeological excavations, DNA-tests and sophisticated computer programmes is able to establish the origin, history and culture of various ethnic groups, cannot believe that all mankind can have descended from one human being and his family, be that Noah or Utanapishtim. The flood story of the Old Testament might have fitted into the prehistoric way of thinking, but it does not give a satisfactory and credible answer to modern Man's questions about the origin of mankind.

Moses and the Easter Lamb

Who was Moses? Was he an Israelite child, whom the daughter of the Pharaoh found in a basket that had been laid in the reeds by the bank of the Nile? Or had he been, as some scholars maintain, a high priest who was forced into exile after failed attempts of the Pharaoh Echnaton to introduce the worshipping of only one god, Aton?

The people of Israel fled to Egypt during the seven lean years, when famine reigned in Canaan. As long as Jacob's youngest son, Joseph, held a high position in Pharaoh's house, the fate of the Israelites was rather tolerable, later however, under the new Pharaoh a period of oppression began.

Even if the Hebrews constituted the cheapest labour for the gigantic building activity started by Ramses II (1290-1224 B.C), the Pharaoh was never satisfied with them. He considered them to be "too lazy" and he also feared that these foreigners, who had multiplied, would stage a revolt and shake off the chains of slavery. Neither could Pharaoh rely on the loyalty of the Hebrews in a possible state of war, as he feared that they would join the attacking enemy. In the end, the Pharaoh decided to solve the Hebrew question by an action that would be called genocide today. At first all male Hebrew infants were to be murdered, while the female ones were to be spared, but the Pharaoh's intentions were unsuccessful, as the midwives who were supposed to carry out the murder, took the side of Life. Then he ordered all newborn Israelite infants to be thrown into the Nile. It is not known whether this story is based on an authentic event and the fact that there is another account of a similar terror action in the Bible but with reversed roles, makes it even harder to pass judgment in the matter. In the second case it is the God of Israel that kills the firstborn infants of the Egyptians when He helps the Israelites to leave Egypt.

Moses was one of the Hebrew male infants who should have been killed according to Pharaoh's orders but his mother's inventiveness saved his life. In spite of his upbringing in the house of Pharaoh he feels solidarity with his compatriots who live in slavery. One day he even kills an Egyptian overseer who is maltreating a Hebrew worker. As he has committed a murder, Moses has to flee from Egypt. He comes to the land of the Midianites on the Sinai Peninsula, where he later gets married. He lives an ordinary family life, that of a shepherd, until he is called by God to be the leader of his people.

Moses lives and acts with the conviction that it is through him God wants to liberate the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery and lead them to the *"land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites."* Exodus 3:..8

God gives Moses different signs to confirm this task. From now on Moses carries on a dialogue with God as if they stood face to face. He refers to the will and command of the Lord whenever he plans a war or when he wants his people to follow his orders.

He seems to have a very personal relationship with God, so that he even asks God to "introduce himself" and reveal his name. It was of great importance that a religious leader should be able to tell his people in which god's name he was acting. God introduced himself with his name consisting of three Hebrew consonants: JHV. For several thousand years theologians have been discussing how these three letters should be interpreted. Depending on the vowels that are placed between the consonants, JHV can mean: *"I am the one I am"*, *"I am what I am"* or *"I shall become what I shall become"*. God appearing for Moses and his people in a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire can even bring us to believe that JHV was the name of the thunder-and-lightning-god of the Midianites that Moses had come into contact with during his exile from Egypt:

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.

Exodus 13:21

Moses changes the religion of the Israelites both in its spiritual and its moral content. He not only founds and introduces the new religion to the Israelites, but he even forces the people to believe in the one and only God Jahve (Jehovah). Today we know that by that time monotheism was not a new religious phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, Amenhotep IV (later called Echnathon) tried to introduce the worship of the “one and only” Sun-god Athon about 1370 BC and there are presumptions that Moses could have been a priest of this new religion.

However, let us turn back to Moses fighting for Israel’s liberation from Egypt. At first he tries to come to an agreement with Pharaoh that he should let the Israelites leave the country, but Pharaoh does not want to make any concessions. Moses, however, is persistent in his struggle. He prays for help to God, who lets Pharaoh and his house be stricken by terrible plagues. Exodus, chapters 9 and 10, describe the disasters that are inflicted on Egypt: the water of the Nile turns into blood, the fish die, the river stinks. The rivers, the earth and the houses of Egypt are invaded with frogs. The Lord lets loose flies over the houses of Pharaoh and his servants, then he lets the animals in the field be stricken by the plague. Finally “A thick darkness lay over the land of Egypt for three days” (Exodus 10:23)

It is possible that some form of natural catastrophe hit Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh, yet it has not been proved that all these disasters really did occur. From a Christian point of view, however, is the historical reliability perhaps not as important as the spiritual message and the image of God reflected by these stories, all the more that the Old Testament is considered to be a Holy Scripture. The question is, whether a person with sound judgment and common sense really can consider these stories to be spiritual and whether people can grow in faith by reading about acts of horror carried out by the God of Moses. Modern Man believes that everything that threatens nature, animals or plants should be fought against. The catastrophes in the Old Testament remind us of the environmental disasters caused by using harmful chemicals and biological weapons in our time.

The horror actions culminate when Moses says:

“Thus says the LORD :’About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the maidservant who is behind the handmill, and all the first-born...But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the LORD does make difference between the Egyptians and Israel.’”

Exodus 11:4...7

*“And it came to pass at midnight that **the Lord struck all the first-born in the land of Egypt**, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in dungeon, and all the first-born of livestock.”*

Exodus 12:29

The gruesome crime should even be rewarded:

“Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing.

And the LORD had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.”

Exodus 12:35-36

Connected with this act of horror the Passover is instituted:

*“This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you....On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself **a lamb**, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.*

And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two door – posts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it....

Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations.”

Exodus 12: 2...14

The author of the Commentary to *Exodus* considers the plagues of Egypt to be God’s righteous punishment of Pharaoh and of the Egyptians: “God passed judgment over the people of Egypt, its gods as well as over the worshiped Pharaoh. The judgment would teach the people that it is terrible to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Free translation from the Commentary to *Exodus 12*)

Christian theologians make a very strange connection between this act of terror and the death of Jesus Christ. It is Paul, the apostle who expresses similarity between Christ and the Lamb-Sacrifice when he says to the Corinthians:

“...purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”

1 Chorinthians 5: 7

Paul gives us to understand that just as the Easter sacrifice meant a new era for Israel, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ means a new life for those who believe in him. According to the accounts of the gospels, however, Jesus did not make any association between his own death and the Passover lamb, other than that his crucifixion happened to coincide with the Jews’ feast of the unleavened bread. In spite of this, Christianity has taken over the Jewish tradition of the lamb and adopted it to the celebration of Easter. The lamb has become a symbol for Jesus in Christian theology, ecclesiastical art and music. Today millions of Christians consume delicate lamb dishes at Easter without considering that, if the story of the *Exodus* is true, the Passover is in fact a reminder of the thousands of innocent Egyptian children who

were sacrificed in a bloody showdown between the people of Israel and the Pharaoh.

The great reformer Jean Calvin encourages people “*to read the Scripture with the purpose of finding Christ in it. The one who departs from this purpose will never get to know the truth...*” (Corpus Ref. 47, 125) Much as one would like to fulfil Calvin’s requirement, it is very doubtful whether one can find Christ in the horror stories related in *Exodus*. Even if Christian theologians have managed to give them religious and pious interpretations, one would like to believe that both the terrible natural catastrophes and the murder of children were only wishful thinking on behalf of Moses and the Israelites and not God’s punishment of innocent women and children.

The Anger of Moses

The Lord enters a remarkable agreement with Moses:

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine”

Exodus 19:5

The condition of this covenant is total obedience to God and the reward is that the people of Israel become the chosen people. But the agreement will soon be broken. When Moses goes up to Mount Sinai in order to receive the tablets of the Testimony containing God’s commandments, he stays up the mountain for forty days. During this time the people become impatient:

“Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’”

Exodus 32:1

Under Aaron’s leadership a golden calf is made that is to be worshiped – a religious custom that the Israelites had learned while living in Egypt. The worship of the calf, the holy bull Apis, symbol of male strength and fertility, was not only an Egyptian religious custom, it had spread into most of the early Semitic religions, from Mesopotamia to Syria.

When Moses comes down from the mountain and finds out what the people have done together with Aaron, he takes some drastic steps. First he threatens with God’s wrath, then he mediates God’s forgive-

ness. The distribution of roles is remarkable: the Lord appears to be the destroyer, while Moses is the deliverer. Moses argues with God and *“So the Lord relented from the harm which he said he would do to his people.”* (Exodus 32:14) This great deed of Moses has filled many Christian theologians with admiration. He is considered to be the merciful and forgiving prophet who loves his people to such an extent that he is even willing to enter into a conflict with the Lord. According to the Commentary to *Exodus*, chapter 32, only a person with an unselfish heart and a great love for mankind, one who lives in a spiritual community with God, is able to carry out this struggle. The author of the commentary seems to forget that this “unselfish” Moses, having returned to the camp after his dispute with God, commits something terrible.

“So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses’ anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.”

Exodus 32:19-20

Breaking the tablets of Testimony was a serious act as it signified the dissolution of the covenant. The water containing the ashes of the golden calf was curse-bringing water that revealed the guilty person who later would be stricken by illness.

Moses holds his brother responsible, but Aaron blames the people for everything. Eventually Moses decides to retaliate for the faithlessness of the Israelites:

*And he said to them, “ Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout he camp, and **let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.**’”*

*So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And **about three thousand men of the people fell that day.***

Exodus 32: 27-28

The cruel deeds of Moses arouse many feelings. Who was this Moses, really: a prophet or a ruthless and severe ruler who takes advantage of God and the faith of the people in order to carry out his plans of conquest?

Commandments: for whom?

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour’s.”

Exodus 20:13-17

According to Christian teachings the Ten Commandments help Man love God and “his neighbour”. As Moses himself breaks the commandment of “*You shall not murder,*” (Exodus 20: 13) as soon as he comes down from Mount Sinai, it is not easy to understand to whom the commandments were directed from the beginning. By reading the books of Thora one understands that the later leaders of Israel followed in Moses’ footsteps and applied the law in an arbitrary way. Almost all commandments lose their validity on several occasions when the people of Moses, of Joshua and of David appropriate land, animals, women and children as soon as a foreign tribe or group of people in Canaan has been conquered. It seems as if the Hebrew word **re**, that is translated with “neighbour” in the last two commandments, only refer to the people of Israel, its compatriots and fellow believers – or sometimes not even them, as it happened during Moses time.

Concerning the origin of the commandments, scholars have been faced with many questions and speculations. Did Moses really spend forty days on Mount Sinai in order to receive the commandments from God or was he “abroad” in order to get inspiration from the laws of other peoples? It is known that a codified legal system already existed

during the reign of Hammurabi, king of Babylonia (1792-1750 B.C.), several centuries before Moses. The law "book" of Hammurabi contained rules concerning all aspects of public and private life. The laws were carved on his memorial column and they were aimed to protect orphans and widows, as well as to keep justice in the country. The resemblance between Moses and Hammurabi's commandments is striking and might be seen as proof of Moses having borrowed a great deal from his predecessor.

Apart from the Ten Commandments Moses also makes known other rules. His aim was firstly to protect the individual and the people of Israel, and secondly to punish the "sinners". Today it is difficult to understand how commandments like "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth...", still practised in some Arab countries and in Southern Europe in the form of vendetta, could be considered as protective measures against violence and criminality.

Execution by stoning was also included in Moses' ethic programme. A disobedient son, for instance, had to be stoned to death "by all the men in town". Stoning to death was a religious custom even in Jesus' time, but the Master rejected it categorically. The parable of the Lost Son reflects what Jesus thought about sons who had sinned. The story was meant to reflect the relationship between God and sinners but it also gives us a lesson in forgiveness and love.

After having wasted his possessions with prodigal living, the Lost Son says:

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants'."

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet."

Luke 15: 18-22

Stoning was a punishment that was also used in cases of adultery or blasphemy. For instance if a husband suspected his wife of adultery he could take her to the priest, who made her go through a terrible procedure of exorcism.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘If any man’s wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully towards him, and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and there was no witness against her, nor was she caught – if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself – then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her...

And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD.

The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put I into the water...

And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse.

And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, “If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband’s authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse.

But if you have gone astray while under your husband’s authority, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you – ...the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your thigh rot and your belly swell;

And may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make your belly swell and your thigh rot.”

Then the woman shall say, “Amen, so be it.”

Numbers 5: 11...22

The LORD speaking to Moses gives the accused woman curse-bringing bitter water. Our thoughts go to the Lord of the New Testament, Jesus Christ offering the water of eternal life to a woman of Samaria who has had five husbands. If Jesus had been a law-abiding Jewish rabbi, he ought to have obeyed the rules and punished her. But Jesus had a totally different attitude to people who had lived a life in debauchery.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

Then the woman of Samaria said to him. "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered and said to her. "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"

Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband', for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."

John 4: 7-19

Who is right, Moses or Jesus? Have the disciples of Jesus during the past 2000 years followed Moses' arbitrary way of applying the Commandments **or** have they lived after the teaching of the Master who said: "...you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?

....

*And **if you greet your brethren only**, what do you do more than others?*

...

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Matthew 5: 45...48

According to the *Confessions of the Swedish Church*, that follows the *Confession of Augsburg* the Christians "*are not under the law, but under the grace of God, as they are released from the curse and doom of the law through their belief in Christ and although their good deeds are yet imperfect and unclean, they are pleasing to God through Christ*". (*free translation from The Concord Formula. p. 607*).

By suspending the law, the gentlemen in Augsburg encouraged moral freedom already in the 16th century. They were certainly aware of the fact that the Mosaic laws had not always been applied and that the first one to violate the commandments was the legislator, Moses himself. Neither were king David nor other leaders of Israel better at living according to the Commandments.

The story about King David and Bathsheba shows that David coveted another man's wife, committed adultery and let murder Uriah, the husband of Bethsheba. In spite of all these deeds, he is still the king venerated as a "holy" man in three religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Now it came to pass in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.

So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hettite?"

Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house.

And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child." ...

Then in the morning it was so that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die."

2 Samuel 11: 1...15

During the Middle Ages several kings and even Christian clergymen followed in king David's footsteps. Adultery, sodomy, simony (purchasing offices), sexual violence, murder and drunkenness tempted popes and bishops who, at the same time, considered themselves to be faultless and legitimate representatives of Christ.

In his book, *Babylon Mystery Religion*, R.E. Woodrow devotes a whole chapter to the immoral life of the popes during the so-called *pornocratic* period. Pope Sergius (904-11), for example, obtained the papal office through murder. He lived in sin with a woman, Marozia, who bore him several illegitimate children. "*He filled the papal chair with mistresses and illegitimate sons...*(R.E. Woodrow)

It was Marozia's grandson who at the age of eighteen became Pope John XII in 955. The Catholic Encyclopaedia describes him as a coarse, immoral man, whose life was such that the Lateran was spoken of as a brothel and the moral corruption in Rome became the subject of general repulsion. The 6th of November a synod composed of

fifty Italian and German bishops convened in St. Peter's Church and accused Pope John XII of sacrilege, simony, perjury, murder, adultery and incest and summoned him in writing to defend himself. He refused the synod and threatened to excommunicate all the participants in case they elected another pope. He took a bloody revenge on the leaders of the opposition. He gave an order to cut off the hands of the bishop-deacon, John as well as the nose and ears of another high official. Bishop Otgar von Speyer was flogged and had to pay with his life. (after Woodrow)

According to Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) "sexual intercourse with women or with boys is not a greater sin than rubbing your hands together." He is charged with idolatry, magic, immorality and even heresy. In 1302 he issued the so-called papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, by which he declares the Roman Catholic Church to be the one and only redeeming Christian community and he says that every human being is the subject of the pope. "*We assert, decide and declare that in order to obtain salvation it is necessary to believe that every human being is a subject of the High Priest of Rome*".

Pope John XXIII (1410-1415) was accused of fornication, adultery, incest, sodomy, simony, theft and murder in the presence of 37 witnesses, mainly bishops and priests. A great number of witnesses asserted that he had seduced and raped three hundred nuns. His secretary, Niem, maintained that the pope had kept a harem in Boulogne where not less than two hundred girls were subjected to sexual abuse.

Alexander VI (1493-1503) is considered to have been the most corrupt of all popes during the Renaissance. It is said that in October 1501 an orgy was held in the Vatican, where fifty naked girls danced and served at table. The pope rewarded the men who had most sexual intercourse with them.

Which laws and commandments did these potentates of the Church observe when living in such depravation? The answer is evident as their behaviour reminds of Abraham who lived in incest with his half-sister Sarah; Lot who had children with his own daughters and king David who committed adultery with Batsheba, the wife of Uriah. The idols of the medieval popes were the characters of the Old Testament

and not Jesus, the Master who had exhorted his disciples to live by high moral standards. These ecclesiastic majesties preferred to resemble the Pharisees about whom Jesus had said:

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.

Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”

Matthew 23: 2-4

The Heavy-Handed Moses

As Moses had broken the tablets of Testimony, he had to go up the mountain once more in order to receive the Commandments of the LORD. The covenant is re-established and the LORD makes promises of fantastic miracles to Israel.

“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

Beware of him and obey his voice, do not provoke him, for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my name is in him.

But if you indeed obey his voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

For my Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Cannanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites and I will cut them off.

You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.”

Exodus 23: 20-24

This text is a well-formulated plan of war that includes safety measures ensuring that the Israelites do not mix with other tribes and adopt their rites. The LORD who talks to Moses rejects the religious manifestations of all other peoples. Today, however, Christians would like to believe in a God who makes no distinction between ethnic groups, race, gender or religion, but is the zealous God of all mankind and of the whole universe.

One has the feeling that it is not God the Father who is talking in these texts but the Man, Moses. He probably felt that religion was the best means to hold together the people of Israel and give them a

“national” identity. The LORD, respectively Moses, was ready to cut off all those who would get in the way of the Israelites.

Moses’ heavy-handed rule and his merciless laws awakened the displeasure of the Israelites. The story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram gives a clear picture of the way Moses acted when dissatisfaction led to revolt. Moses’ tyranny and especially the unjust, hierarchical division of the order of priests irritated Korah, Dathan and Abiram who together with two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation came to Moses and Aaron and said to them:

“You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?”

Numbers 16: 3

The protest of Korah, Dathan and Abiram is defeated. According to Moses it was the LORD who took revenge for this uprising, yet one can guess what methods Moses used this time in order to get rid of the rebels. The story itself points to a very cruel technique of extermination. When reading these texts one should remember that many of the punishments carried out by Moses and other leaders took place on territories that were rich in gas, oil and tam (bitumen). It is therefore probable that Moses and other leaders knew how to make use of a gas explosion when they wanted the earth “to open its mouth” and of oil when they needed fire.

“and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods.

So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the congregation.

Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, ‘Lest the earth swallow us up also!’

And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.”

Numbers 16:32-35

The cruel story does not end here. Next day the wrath of the LORD is aroused and after several visitations not less than 14 700 persons die. Here, like in many other cases, God is the one who puts the people to death while Moses tries to reconcile and to save their lives. This was the LORD that the people of Israel had to fear and believe in and that the Christians have to venerate, in spite of the fact that Jesus never presents God, the Father as someone who wants to exterminate people.

The cruelty of Moses was boundless. He started war against the Midianites as the men of Israel had mixed with their women. He seems to have forgotten that he himself had “mixed” with a Midianite woman, his own wife, whom he had married under his flight from Egypt.

And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, and they killed all the males.

They killed the kings of Midian

And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods.

They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts.

And they took all the spoil and all the booty, both of man and beast.

Numbers 31:7-11

Moses was not satisfied with this massacre. He was exasperated with the military leaders because they had let all women live. “*Have you kept all the women alive?*”, he asks and then gives the order: “*kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately.*” *Numbers 31: 17-18*

Moses’ fear that by mixing with the women of the Midianites the Israelites would adapt their religious rites does not justify the cruel genocide. Ritual prostitution at shrines was part of several religions at the time. It was presumably sexual intercourse of this kind that Moses had in mind when talking about trespassing against the LORD “in the

incident of Peor”. In any case, the punishment carried out by Moses in the name of God cannot be considered as anything but an abominable act of terror. The detailed description of the captured bounty, the main part of which fell to the priests’ share, helps us understand the real purpose of all the wars led by Moses in the name of the Lord.

**“I will make my arrows drunk with blood,
And my sword shall devour flesh,”**

Deuteronomy 32:42

On his death-bed Moses spoke in the presence of all the congregation of Israel the words of a remarkable song expressing a fearful image of the LORD, that had to be passed from generation to generation.

*“Now see that I, even I, am he,
And there is no God besides me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
Nor is there any who can deliver from my hand.
For I lift my hand to heaven, and say, ‘As I live for ever,
If I whet my glittering sword,
And my hand takes hold on judgment,
I will render vengeance to my enemies,
And repay those who hate me.
I will make my arrows drunk with blood,
And my sword shall devour flesh,
With the blood of the slain and the captives,
From the heads of the leaders of the enemy.”*

Deuteronomy 32: 39-42

Moses sings of a bloodthirsty god of war, whose worship was important in the struggle for the Promised Land. Unfortunately, this god-image has been handed down to several religions and even used to political purposes.

According to Moses’ predictions the zealous LORD of Israel will both curse and bless, he will destroy and then save his people:

“And it shall be, that just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do good and multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.

Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known – wood and stone.

And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.”

Deuteronomy 28:63-65

Regrettably, this prophecy has been fulfilled on several occasions in the history of Israel. According to Bible scholars the author had the intention partly to prepare the people for future misfortunes and partly to provide them with a reasonable explanation for their historical failures.

“As you have believed, so let it be for you” (Matthew 8:13), says Jesus to an officer who has come to him with the belief that the Master could cure his servant. Jesus often talks about the power of faith that can activate both good and evil forces. The people of Israel believed in a LORD who punishes, destroys and annihilates. Extermination and self-extinction – this duplicity runs like a red thread through the history of the Israelites in the Old Testament.

Moses’ way of thinking about God had been hammered into the people of Israel and carried on by Joshua, the successor of Moses who acts and talks in a very similar way to his predecessor. When he occupies Jericho he says to his people:

“Shout, for the LORD has given you the city!

Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab, the prostitute shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent...

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword...

...they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.”

Joshua 6; 16...24

Clergymen often use the story of Jericho as an example of the wonderful acts of God towards all those whom he loves and those who trust in him, but not a word is mentioned about the victims, women, children, both young people and old, who had to pay with their lives. In the Preface of the *Book of Joshua* (Swedish Bible of 2000) we can read:

“Like all historical accounts in the Old Testament, the content (of the Book of Joshua) is a combination of relating historical events and preaching. The theme is evident: God blesses those who observe his commandments. Therefore, the perspective is theological.” One wonders which blessing and what theological perspective the author of the Preface has in mind when he/she reads the following:

“On that day Joshua took Makkedah, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them – all the people who were in it. He let none remain...”

*So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their kings; **he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded.”***

Joshua 10: 28, 40

“And all the spoil of these cities and the livestock, the children of Israel took as booty for themselves; but they struck every man with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them, and they left none breathing.

As the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Joshua 11:14-15

It is doubtful whether Israel was all that successful in its warfare as the historian describes. It is more likely that the land of Canaan was occupied only partly and by degrees. At any rate, violence, destruction and genocide should not be regarded as a fulfilment of the commandments of God, especially not according to the faith and philosophy of life presented by Jesus.

Heram: “...kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child...”

1 Samuel 15: 3

“Give us a king”, the elders of Israel requested from Samuel, who possessed the qualities of a prophet, priest and judge. Samuel regarded the wish of the people as the violation of theocracy. He thought that the Israelites did not wish to place their fate into the hands of the LORD, Jehova anymore. Samuel knew that Gentiles considered kings to be the embodiment of gods – in most cases a god of war or fertility. It is probable that Samuel wished to avoid such an anthropomorphic attitude to the LORD, but in the end he had to give in to the request of the elders of Israel.

Saul is not particularly appreciated as a king. The only place he can assert himself is on the battlefield. First, he defeats the Ammonites, but later he makes a mistake. During the war against the Amalekites he does not carry out *heram* – total annihilation of the enemy that was ordered by the LORD of hosts through Samuel:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish what Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him on the way when he came up from Egypt.

Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

1 Samuel 15: 2-3

Heram was a well-known phenomenon in the Orient during Antiquity. It meant that the warriors bound themselves by oath to destroy the enemy. Saul won a great victory in the battle against the

Amalekites. He had killed the men, the children, the babies and the mothers, but saved the greater part of the animals and the king, Agag, himself, most likely in order to show him off in the triumphal procession. Saul's defective cruelty aroused God's wrath and regret at having made him king.

According to the Commentary to *Genesis* 12, *heram* is not a "sin"; it is a legitimate action ordered by Jehovah in order to protect his beloved people. The writer of the Commentary is of the opinion that human acts that violate life and God's legal system justify *heram*. God does not want to take revenge through *heram*, he only wants to repay the injustice. By means of cryptic theological explanations the author of the commentary tries to legitimise Saul's acts of violence without taking into consideration that a great part of the victims were women and innocent children.

Not a single ear

The LORD, God of Israel and the chosen people of Israel are almost permanently in a sort of tyrannical relationship with one another. Jehovah preserves, protects and loves his people on the condition that they respect and love Him and obey his commandments. As the promised reward is great, so are the demands:

“For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do – to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to hold fast to him – then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves.

Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even the Western Sea, shall be your territory.

No man shall be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as he has said to you.

Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse:

the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today;

and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.”

Deuteronomy 11:22-28

According to Christian theology all historical events in the Bible are to be interpreted in a salvation-historical perspective as it points forward to Jesus, the Saviour. However, it cannot possibly be that simple. Jesus, who rejected all violence, cannot be the explanation for a bloody history of thousands of years, beginning with Cain and Abraham. Fear

and love of a punishing God was perhaps a political necessity in Israel's historical situation at the time of the Tablets but it was an unnecessary religious drawback in the "new time" when Jesus came. The fierceness of the Israelites contrasts with Jesus' NON VIOLENCE philosophy that is most evident in the texts relating his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane.

"And while he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Now his betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'Whoever I kiss, he is the one; seize him.'

Then immediately he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him.

And Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come?' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took him.

And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

*Then Jesus said to him, '**Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.**'"*

Matthew 26:47-52

Jesus verbalises his non-violence programme very clearly. However, a short historical survey of Christianity shows that the Master's "**Put back your sword**"-admonition has not been heeded during the past 2000 years.

The first three hundred years were characterized by struggle and conflict on two levels: one outside and one inside "the body of Christ", that is the Church. These conflicts demanded the life of both many Christian martyrs and heathens. Christian absolute rulers applied the same intolerant and bloody policies of expansion as the sons of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David and other leaders of the people from Old Testament times.

When Christianity after years of war and violence at last became an established religion in most European countries, a period of peace

would have been desirable. But dark forces steered events towards more disruption. During the Middle Ages rivalling and revengeful popes and patriarchs excommunicated each other which eventually led to the schism between Eastern and Western Christians in 1054.

During the Middle Ages popes and patriarchs surpassed each other in hatred and cruelty.

The most amazing account of hatred comes from the time of Pope Stephanus VI (896-897). Not even the dead could avoid his vengeance. It is said that he committed the former Pope Formosus (891-896), who at the time had been dead for eight months, to trial. Pope Stephanus let Formosus' dead body be brought from the crypt and dressed in a splendid papal shroud, as he wished to "interrogate" the dead pope. Formosus could not defend himself for natural reasons, so he was found guilty. His fingers, with which he had administered his blessings, were cut off and thrown into the street, and his mutilated body was tied behind a carriage, dragged along the streets of Rome and finally thrown into the river Tiber. (after Woodrow)

The papal bull "*Ad extirpanda*" issued by Pope Innocentius IV in 1252, was confirmed and applied by several popes. According to the bull all heretics who rejected the teachings of the pope and the Church should be "trampled to death like poison snakes". Incredible instruments and methods of torture were invented with the purpose to cause as much suffering as possible. The "Iron Maiden", for instance, was shaped like the body of a woman, equipped on the inside with sharp knives that cut the condemned victim's body to pieces. On the inside this instrument was sprinkled with holy water and carried the text: "Soli Deo Gloria" ("To the glory of God alone").

The cruel ecclesiastical policy of the Middle Ages did not only strike individual "heretics", in some cases it was even directed against entire groups of people who did not live according to the teachings and laws of the established Church. The Cathars, for instance, got into trouble because of their strange religious customs that aroused the destructive urge of popes Alexander III and Innocent III. This is the story told by one of the Crusaders, the abbot Arnold of Citeaux, who in 1208 was sent with troops to take revenge for the murder of the

Papal Legate Peter: “Our people did not take any consideration for social position, gender or age, we butchered almost twenty thousand persons and when the enemy had been ruthlessly defeated, the town was looted and burned down, so that God’s vengeance was carried out in a marvellous way” (Free translation from Simonides: *The Religions of the World*).

The Reformation also took its toll. Sir John Oldcastle, a follower of John Wycliffe, the great English reformer, was burned at the stake. Jan Hus, Czech theologian and reformer, who spread Wycliffe’s ideas about ecclesiastic and social reforms on the Continent, met a similar fate. Books about ecclesiastical history do not contain exact particulars showing the number of those who died in armed conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, but one can suspect that many had to pay with their lives, especially during the Counter-Reformation in Central Europe.

Not even the two great reformers, Martin Luther and Jean Calvin, can be considered to be free from a bullying manner and oppressive actions. In 1525, during the Peasant Revolt in Germany, Martin Luther stood at first on the side of the revolting peasants, but soon he was of the opinion that “the more one taught and admonished them, the prouder and madder they became” (Virág, Jenö: *Dr Martin Luther About Himself*). Then he changed sides and, according to some sources, even asked for military intervention, with the result that the Peasant Revolt ended in a terrible bloodbath. It is known that Jean Calvin, with exaggerated piety, forced strict, at times almost unbearable rules of conduct and religion on the inhabitants of Genève. At the time of the Reformation they had to live in constant fear of decapitation and bestial executions.

Life-saving commandments like “You shall not kill” and “You shall love your neighbour like yourself” seem to have lost their validity and function to the same degree during the time of the New Testament as they had done during Moses and David. Why? The Master gives the answer:

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

For everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed”.

John 3:19-20



Two hundred foreskins for a bride

The Old Testament is often characterized by contradictions and inconsequence. For example, king David is sometimes described as holy and righteous, sometimes as a base murderer and traitor. David commits his perhaps most heroic deed in the beginning of his political career: he slays the giant Goliath and later carries his head proudly to Jerusalem. In this way David gains glory and the esteem of the people.

“And the Philistine said to David, ‘Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!’

Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.’”

1 Samuel 17:44-46

David’s words to Goliath have been given a “prophetic” interpretation in Christian theology, although the story deals with nothing but the quarrel and boastful trial of strength between two warriors. From a Christian and fellow-human point of view the life of both Goliath and the Philistines ought to be as valuable before God as the life of David. Murder should never be sanctioned, not even if one is of the opinion, in some contexts, that “the end justifies the means”.

David’s life path goes through deep abysses and high peaks. He plays his lute for king Saul under the pretext of curing him of his illness but at the same time takes the opportunity to manipulate Saul’s son, Jonathan, whom he manages to turn against his father. Actually at

the beginning Saul likes the young David and does not suspect that he is his future enemy. Saul appoints David as his military commander and gives him his daughter Michal in marriage.

The authors of the Bible Commentary are of the opinion that Saul's behaviour is fiendish, but have an obvious understanding when David sacrifices the life of two hundred Philistines in order to buy his bride Michal. Saul had demanded the foreskin of one hundred Philistines as "price" for his daughter but David was so eager to comply with the demands of his future father-in-law that he killed two hundred Philistines.

"...therefore David arose and went, he and his men, and killed two hundred men of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full count to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife."

1 Samuel 18:27

When the princes of the Philistines went out to war, David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed. However, at a later occasion we find him on the side of the enemy, the Philistines. And what is more, he insists on taking part in the war against his own people but the Philistines do not trust him. The Scripture does not contain any particulars concerning the reason for David's "treason"; one can only presume that he fled to the Philistines because his life was endangered or because he was carrying out espionage. It is also possible that he quite simply wanted to bring about the fall of king Saul.

David was a man of contrasts. He was an ardent believer, but did not always make use of his faith in God for edifying purposes. For example, he spares the life of Saul "for he is the LORD's anointed" (1 Samuel 24: 10), but later he decides that all descendants of Saul should be executed. He asserts that the drought that fell upon the country is the result of Saul's sin who let many Gibeonites be murdered. As David lies on his death-bed, he gives detailed instructions to his son Solomon how to carry out the murder of Saul's family. David's orders to Solomon could be regarded as an emergency measure; as mentioned

earlier, in Antiquity it was common to sacrifice animals and even humans in order to prevent a natural catastrophe. In this case, however, it is more probable that David let Saul's descendants be hanged for purely political reasons: he simply wanted to secure the throne for his own son, Solomon.

According to the Commentary to *1 Kings*, chapter 2, however, David's decision had nothing to do with a ritual sacrifice. Neither was it a question of his human weakness, but it was the fulfilment of the will of God:

“God considers every sin in order to judge it. A postponement of the punishment does not mean that the sin is forgotten. At times the debt of the sins accumulates for several generations and centuries, until God finally avenges them by terrible judgments.” (Commentary to *1 Kings* 2). Does this way of thinking correspond to the teaching of Jesus? How can the author of the Commentary forget the Master's words about ‘*mercy and not sacrifice*’?

“And so it was, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’

But when Jesus heard that, he said to them ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’”

Matthew 9: 10-13

David's personality, psyche and relationship to the LORD is summed up masterfully in 2 Samuel chapter 22 where we can read his own words:

“Then David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.

*And he said:
‘The LORD is my rock,
my fortress and my deliverer;
The God of my strength,
in him I will trust,
My shield and the horn of my
salvation,
My stronghold and my refuge;
My Saviour, you save me from
violence.’ »*

2 Samuel 22 :1-3

These words of David are almost identical to Psalm 18 that is frequently used in the Christian church as a prayer. They are beautiful words as long as we do not analyse them contextually and confront them with David’s conceit and lack of self-criticism. He, who has often offended against the commandments of the LORD, is singing about his righteousness:

*“The LORD rewarded me
according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands
He has recompensed me.
For I have kept the ways of the LORD,
And have not wickedly departed from my God.”*

2 Samuel, 22:21-22

It is not clear, which laws and rules king David has in mind when he says that he has “kept the ways of the LORD”, but they can hardly be the Ten Commandments. The only commandment he really obeyed was the first one: “ You shall have no other gods before me.” David was faithful to “his” God who taught his hands to make war, armed him with strength for the battle and gave him the necks of his enemies.

*“For who is God, except the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God?
God is my strength and power,
And he makes my way perfect.*

.....

***He teaches my hands to make war,
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.***

*You have also given me the shield of your salvation,
And your gentleness has made me great.
I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them;*

.....

*and wounded them,
So that they could not rise;
They have fallen under my feet.
For you have armed me with strength for the battle;
You have subdued under me those who rose against me.
You have also given me the necks of my enemies.”*

2 Samuel, 22:32...41

It is hard to understand why Christianity considers David, who today undoubtedly would be condemned by the International Criminal Court, to be the righteous believer and the precursor of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. David was, no doubt, a gifted military commander who loved power and his people, but to endow him with an outstanding significance in theology and in the history of religion as “God’s Chosen One” or “God’s True Servant” is an affront to the God who sent his Son to save the world from the forces of violence.

Jesus and the House of David

The promise that a great number of people shall issue from Abraham and his descendants has been handed down from generation to generation. Jacob, later to be called Israel, is given a similar promise when God says to him:

“I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body.”

Genesis 35:11

Waiting for a king, a Messiah who shall fulfil this promise, has been the sustaining and uniting force of the Jewish people through the ages. When Jesus begins his mission as God’s messenger, the Jews become suspicious and feel threatened because in certain circles he is considered to be the “descendant” through whom God’s promise should be fulfilled. But he is a man whose antecedents and identity cannot be traced. He comes from Galilee, *the gal goim*, the land of the non-Jews from whence nothing good could come. The Messiah they were waiting for should originate from Judea and be descended from the house of David. Reading the Gospels one has to conclude that Jesus did not bother to prove his Judaical or Davidian descent. It is mostly the evangelist Matthew who takes great pains to compile Jesus’ genealogical table, starting with Abraham down to Jesus’ stepfather Joseph. Luke contributes also by writing a thrilling story about the birth of Jesus in the city of David, Bethlehem in Judaea.

Doing research according to the genealogical table presented by Matthew does not seem important as Jesus is not the biological son of Joseph. Furthermore, the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem, who had quite good information about all the former kings of Israel and

Judaea, did not approve that Jesus “was of the house of lineage of David”, as Luke asserts in his Gospel.

Luke begins his book by saying that all the particulars he is giving concerning the events connected with Jesus are reliable. But as soon as one reads his story about the birth of Christ, suspicions arise as to whether the particulars are indeed reliable. We understand soon enough that Luke’s main purpose was not to adhere to the absolute truth after all. His main concern was to prove that Jesus was born in David’s city and that Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when her time came to give birth to her child.

“And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house of lineage of David,

To be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Luke 2: 1-7

The historians of Christianity accept Luke’s assertion that Mary and Joseph were in Judea, in the city of David, called Bethlehem and they do not give a single thought about another place, also called Bethlehem that was in Galilee at a distance of only 11 kilometres North-East of Nazareth. In case Mary really stayed in Bethlehem when expecting her first child, it is more likely that she was in the place near Nazareth and that she did not start a long journey (more than 100 kilometres) on foot, all the way down to Bethlehem in Judea. Neither is Luke’s statement correct that Quirinius was governor of Syria and that a census was held in the Roman Empire during the reign of Emperor Augustus.

According to the historian Josephus the first census took place about six years after the birth of Christ.

It has been entirely unthinkable to question Jesus' Jewish and Davidian ancestry, therefore texts where Jesus comments on the matter have been ignored. In his disputes with the Jews for example, he refers to his eternal pre-existence but the Jews misunderstand him totally when he says:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Then the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’

Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham, I AM’.”

John 8:56-58

Another time, when arguing with the Phariseans, he asks:

“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is he?” They said to him, ‘The son of David.’

He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call him ‘Lord’...

If David then calls him ‘Lord’, how is he his Son?’

And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question him any more.”

Matthew 22: 42...46

Jesus did not consider himself being descended from neither Abraham nor David. Neither did he identify himself with the Jews, whom he addressed as **“You Jews”**. His parents, Mary and Joseph lived in Galilee, an area that was called *galil hag goim*, which means “the land of the non-Jews”. The word *goim* was used to denote foreign people, for instance Hettites, the Mesopotamian and the ancient Guti people. In Galilee today there are practically no archaeological traces of synagogues built earlier than 200-300 years after Christ, therefore the number of Israelites in the area must have been very small. The

explanation of this situation is the tragic history of Israel. In 734 B.C. when the Assyrian king, Tiglat Pileser III conquered Galilee, a great part of the population was deported and replaced by foreigners. The same thing occurred during the Babylonian occupation, when the people of Israel were scattered once more.

After the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, during the reign of the Persian king Chyros the Jews of the Diaspora got the chance to return “home” (538 B.C.). Those who took advantage of this possibility moved mainly to Jerusalem and its surroundings, as the Temple was rebuilt and it became the central, uniting point. The reason why the Jews were not attracted to move back to Galilee is partly that there were foreign people living in the area and partly that the Israelites’ places of worship and synagogues had been destroyed. The small number of Jews still left in Galilee moved to Judea during Simon Maccabeus in 165 B.C. Fifty years later, when the area was recaptured during the reign of the king Aristobulus I (104-103 B.C.), the Jews started to settle in Galilee again, but the Roman conquest of Palestine in 63 B.C. changed the history of the Israelites once more.

Messiah

The Immanuel Prophecy

*“Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying,
‘Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in
the depth or in the height above.’*

But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!’

*Then he said, ‘Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for
you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?’*

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; Behold, the virgin
shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

*Curds and honey he shall eat, that he may know to refuse the evil
and choose the good.*

*For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the
good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.’”*

Isaiah 7:10-16

According to Christian theology this text is a prophecy about the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and it is read every Christmas in churches all over the world. It is done in spite of the fact that a contextual analysis makes it obvious that Isaiah is not referring to Jesus, but to another child to be born during the reign of king Ahaz, when “*Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim*” and when the heart of king Ahaz and of his people “*were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.*” (Isaiah 7)

The prophecy is clear: Immanuel is to be born in a very concrete historical situation when the land that king Ahaz feared, “will be forsaken by both kings”. Ahaz, king of Judah (747-715 B.C.), was terrified of two kings: Resin, king of Aram, and Peka, king of the Israelites who wanted to force him into an alliance with Tiglat-Pileser III, king of the Assyrians. The fact that these kings lived about 700 years before the

birth of Christ should be sufficient evidence that the Immanuel that Isaiah is talking about is not the infant Jesus.

The contradictory images of the Messiah show that there was a great variety of expectations and wishes concerning the king who was to come. According to the prophet Zechariah, for instance, this King, whose “arrow will go forth like lightning”, should be victorious as the LORD of hosts will defend him and his people:

*“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.*

.....

*Then the LORD will be seen over them,
And his arrow will go forth like lightning.
The Lord GOD will blow the trumpet,
And go with whirlwinds from the south.
The LORD of hosts will defend them;
They shall drink and roar as if with wine;
They shall be filled with blood like basins,
Like the corners of the altar.
The LORD their God will save them in that day.
As the flock of his people.
For they shall be like the jewels of a crown,”*

Zechariah 9: 9...16

Zechariah is not alone in giving a contradictory picture of the Messiah to come. According to the prophet Isaiah this king is not only strong and victorious, he is also a humble Servant, an Ebed Jahve, the Lord’s Servant who is going to spread righteousness among the peoples:

*“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom my soul delights!
I have put my Spirit upon him;
He will bring forth justice to he Gentiles.
He will not cry out, nor raise his voice
Nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.”*

Isaiah 42: 1-2

In spite of his weakness this servant shall accomplish great deeds, as the messenger of the LORD:

*“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness,
And will hold your hand;
I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people,
As a light to he Gentiles,
To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the prison,
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.”*

Isaiah 42: 6-7

The Christian tradition uses the Old Testament prophecies without investigating whether they are applicable to Jesus or not. To identify him with a king under whose leadership the armies “swallow their enemies” can be nothing but a historical mistake. He is neither an Ebed Jahve – the Servant, who does not cry and shout and does not let his voice be heard on the streets, nor is he blind and deaf as Isaiah writes in his prophecy.

*”Who is blind but my servant,
Or deaf as my messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as he who is perfect,
And blind as the LORD’s servant?”*

Isaiah 42: 19

*“He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see him,
There is no beauty that we should desire him.
He is despised and rejected by men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem him.”*

Isaiah 53: 2-3

The gospels give us no information about Jesus being a repulsive, weak and taciturn person as Isaiah depicts the coming Servant of the Lord. On the contrary, Jesus was an active, charismatic and extrovert preacher who spread his message in the Temple, in the streets, on the lakeshore and mountain slope. He threw the merchants out of the Temple and had heated discussions with the Pharisees and the scribes. The texts of the New Testament do not contain the slightest reference of him being “blind” or “deaf”.

Most Bible scholars agree that Ebed Jahve, the Servant of the Lord named in the Old Testament is a description of the land of Israel and its harrowed people. It is also possible that the prophecies are about a prophet or a well-known leader who had failed. The statements of Isaiah seem to be reminiscent of, for example, Job who complains as follows:

*“But he has made me a byword of the people,
And I have become one in whose face men spit.”*

Job 17: 6

Even if some parts of the prophecy of Isaiah about the coming Prince of Peace and the Servant of the LORD could symbolically be applied to Jesus, theologians ought to bear in mind that Jesus did not use the term Ebed Jahve (the Servant of Jahve) concerning his own person.

“Who do the crowds say that I am”

Jesus is curious about what people think of him and that is why he asks his disciples:

”Who do the crowds say that I am?”

So they answered and said, ‘John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.’”

Luke 9: 18-19

The Master is not satisfied with the answer; he also wants to know the opinion of the disciples. *“But who do you say I am?”* When Peter answers, *“The Christ of God”*, he strictly commands them to tell this to no one. (Luke 9:20-21)

The same event is related in a quite different way in the gospel according to Matthew, where Jesus praises Peter for his statement about his being the Messiah.

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’

And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’

Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’”

Matthew 16:15-18

It cannot have been purely by chance that Peter is praised for his “Messiah-declaration” in the Gospel of Matthew. It has already been pointed out that Matthew is most concerned with applying the Messiah-prophecies of the Old Testament to Jesus. However the

appointment of Peter as the rock on which the Church is to be built has not been his idea, but that of later popes and bishops. Through the addition of the story about Peter's nomination as the "rock" of the church, these majesties could legitimise their function as the representatives of Christ on earth. It is known that the Catholic popes, bishops and priests consider themselves to be the direct successors of Peter and Paul and by that of Jesus Christ. Neither the ecclesiastic majesties, nor the editors of the Gospels thought of the fact that the appointment of Peter contradicts Jesus' non-hierarchical way of thinking. This is evident from a conversation between the Master and his disciples:

"They said to him, 'Grant us that we may sit, one on your right hand and the other on your left, in your glory.'

But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?'

And they said to him, 'We can.' And Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized;

but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.'

And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.

But Jesus called them to himself and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.'"

Mark 10:37-43

The words of the Master have not gained hearing: for 2000 years popes, cardinals, patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops, archbishops and other dignitaries of the Church have ruled over each other and over the Christians of the whole world. Those Disciples of Christ who preferred to live after the habits of worldly rulers have failed to establish *The Church* as the Master wanted them to be characterized by high spirituality.

The different statements about Jesus in the Gospels indicate that there was a certain confusion concerning his identity. The people thought that he was a reincarnation of some prophet or that he was John the Baptist. Anyhow he was not regarded as the Messiah who was to come and Jesus himself did not use that term to refer to himself. He preferred to be called *the Son of Man*.

“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

He spoke this word openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when he had turned around and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”

Mark 8:31-33

Jesus always used the term *Son of Man* in the third person singular which may be a reference to his earthly identity as the son of Mary. As a heavenly being he was called the *Son of God*. The earthly, material and the spiritual, divine nature of Jesus has been debated ever since his death, in spite of all evident texts about his two natures in the New Testament and other scriptures like the Apocrypha. The Gnostic texts that were found in Nag Hammadi tell us that Jesus left his tormented earthly body on the cross in order to reveal himself in his glorified body for some of his disciples who were hiding in Gethsemane. The *Apocalypse of Peter*, for example, relates an interesting version of the crucifixion:

... I saw him apparently being seized by them. And I said, “What am I seeing, O Lord? Is it really you whom they take? And are you holding on to me? And are they hammering the feet and hands of another? Who is this one above the cross, who is glad and laughing?” The Saviour said to me, “He whom you saw being glad and laughing above the cross is the Living Jesus. But he into whose hands and feet they are driving the nails is his fleshly part, which is the substitute. They put to

shame that which remained in his likeness. And look at him, and (look at) me!” (Apocalypse of Peter 81.4-24 in NHL 344)

Pagels, Elaine “The Gnostic Gospels” page 72

The Greek word *gnosis*, usually translated as “knowledge”, does not mean primarily rational knowledge. The Gnostics used the term for knowing through observation or experience. *Gnosis* can be translated as “insight”, for it involves an intuitive process of knowing oneself and simultaneously knowing God. According to the Gnostics Jesus does not come to save us from sin but he comes as a master, a guide who opens access to spiritual understanding.

Another Gnostic text, the *Acts of John*, discovered before Nag Hammadi, “explains that Jesus was not a human being at all; instead, he was a spiritual being who adapted himself to human perception.” (Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, page 73)

Elaine Pagels, who has translated parts of the Nag Hammadi texts, solves the complicated theological problem of the two natures of Jesus that has caused many quarrels and schism in the Church of Christ. She says:

*“According to the **Treatise on Resurrection**, discovered at Nag Hammadi, insofar as Jesus was the “Son of Man,” being human, he suffered and died like the rest of humanity. But since he was also “Son of God,” the divine spirit within him could not die: in that sense he transcended suffering and death.”*

Pagels, Elaine “The Gnostic Gospels” page 75

“I Find No Fault in This Man”

According to the Gospels Jesus was very reserved about being identified with the Messiah the Jews were waiting for. He was certainly familiar with the political and religious implications of the concept. He knew that the Messiah of the Jews was to come from the house of David, to which he did not consider himself to belong. Not even the cunning entreaty of the high priest Caiaphas could get him to admit that he was the Messiah:

“But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to him: ‘By the living God I put you under oath to tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God.’

Jesus said to him, ‘You yourself said (it). Yet I say to you, henceforth you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’

Then the high priest ripped his outer garments, saying, ‘He has blasphemed ! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy! What is your opinion?’

They answered and said, ‘He deserves death.’

Then they spat into his face and hit him with their fists. Others slapped him in the face...”

Matthew 26:63-67

Caiaphas’ intention was to have Jesus condemned. If he had managed to get Jesus to answer “Yes, I am the Messiah, the King”, he could have accused him before the Romans of being a political rebel, one who asserts that he is the king of the Jews. If Jesus had answered “no”, Caiaphas could have discredited him before the people by saying that he was not the Messiah they had been waiting for.

The four gospels give different accounts of what Jesus said to the high priest and the Sanhedrin (the Great Council). According to Mark,

the evangelist, when the high priest asks “*Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*” Jesus answers in the affirmative, “*I am.*” (Mark 15: 62) In the gospel according to John the question about Messiah is not even mentioned. The high priest only asks Jesus about his teaching and his disciples. As Jesus avoids giving a full detailed answer, he is considered provocative.

“The high priest then asked Jesus about his disciples and his doctrine. Jesus answered him, ‘I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple; where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing.

Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.’

And when he had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, ‘Do you answer the high priest like that?’

John 18:19-22

Jesus’ meeting with Pilate is not as dramatic. The accounts given by the four evangelists differ again in many ways, but they agree about one thing: all four of them say that Pilate did not consider Jesus to be guilty and did not want to sentence him to be crucified.

“Then the whole multitude of them arose and led him to Pilate.

*And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this **fellow** perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ, a King.’*

So Pilate asked him, saying, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ And he answered him and said, ‘It is as you say.’

*Then Pilate said to the chief priest and the crowd, “**I find no fault in this man.**”*

But they were the more fierce, saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.’”

Luke 23:1-5

Pilate's task was to punish troublemakers and agitators in the Roman Empire. If Jesus had indeed acted as the long-awaited king of Israel from the House of David, the Jews would have praised and accepted him as their Messiah and he would have awakened Pilate's suspicions.

The question of who bears the guilt for Jesus' death, the Romans or the Jews, has been debated for two thousand years. The gospel according to John relates that Pilate handed over Jesus to the high priests. This information has caused much trouble and suffering as later the Jewish people have been unfairly accused of being guilty for the death of Christ.

“From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, saying ‘If you let this man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.

Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’

But they cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’

The chief priests answered. ‘We have no king but Caesar!’

So he delivered him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led him away.’”

John 19:12-16

The executioners were Roman soldiers, but it was the high priests who were prosecutor and judge, together with the people who shouted: “Crucify him!” It is unclear what sort of people made up the crowd. There were probably Jews who did not know much about Jesus but truly believed that he was a criminal, Jewish religious believers who felt that their religious identity was threatened, or Romans who did not understand what was happening, but wanted to take part anyway. There could even have been people who had seen Jesus perform mira-

cles and listened to his very different message, but were carried away by the madness of those shouting “Crucify him!”

The end of time

Prophecies and speculations about the final period of history have occurred in most religions through the ages. In the Old Testament we can find many descriptions of visions, revelations and dreams about the approaching end of the world. The prophet Isaiah, for instance, writes the following about the day of the Lord, when the whole earth will be devastated:

*“The LORD of hosts musters
the army for battle.
They come from a far country,
From the end of heaven,
Even the LORD and his weapons of indignation,
to destroy the whole land.*

*Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand!
It will come as destruction from the Almighty.
Therefore all hands will be limp,
Every man’s heart will melt,
And they will be afraid.*

.....

*Behold, the day of the LORD comes,
Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger,
To lay the land desolate;
And he will destroy its sinners from it.”*

Isaiah 13: 4..9

Prophecies about the end of time are always connected with a certain historical situation. According to Isaiah the day of the LORD should come during the reign of Nabuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.), when the LORD musters his army and leads the fatal action. The prophecy

of Isaiah did not come true exactly in the way he had wished, as his dreams and promise of a glorious time in the history of Israel have never been fulfilled.

There is a certain pattern in all the prophecies about the last days of the history of mankind. At first people are threatened with the final devastating catastrophe, then they are promised salvation through a Redeemer, a Messiah or the LORD himself who intervenes and rescues his beloved chosen people that will afterwards have a life like in paradise. Isaiah follows the same pattern; after having threatened with total destruction, he provides consolation by saying:

*“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of the vengeance of our God;
To comfort those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
.....
And they shall rebuild the old ruins,
.....
Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
And the sons of the foreigner
Shall be your ploughmen and your vine-dressers.”*

Isaiah 61: 1..5

According to the evangelists, Jesus also talked about the end of time. It is said that he, for instance, predicted the approaching fall of the Temple of Jerusalem that really took place in the year 70. But many of Jesus' prophecies about the end of time are similar to apocalyptic statements of the Old Testament and are mostly found in the Gospel of Matthew. He is the evangelist who often reproduces ancient

prophecies almost literally by using old texts as they were words of Jesus:

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand)

“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

.....

“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

And if those days had not been shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”

Matthew 24: 15..22

There is a striking similarity between this prophecy and the one we find in the book of Daniel:

*“And there shall be a time of trouble;
Such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time.
And at that time your people shall be delivered,
Every one who is found written in the book.”*

Daniel 12: 1

The prophecies in the New Testament were worded during the time of the Roman Empire, which was a new period of tribulations for the Jews. In all probability both Jesus and later the evangelists were aware that the conflict between the Roman rulers and the Jewish people was inevitable. Jesus could also foresee that kings, emperors and established religious leaders would fight against the new religion he had founded. He did not know, however, when this would take place, therefore he said:

“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.

But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

Matthew 24: 34-36

The three synoptic gospel authors, Matthew, Mark and Luke wanted to present Jesus as the Redeemer who would defeat the forces of evil. However, they were facing a problem: the Saviour, Messiah, had arrived before the great tribulation took place. The evangelists find a very smart solution; they postpone the redeeming mission of the Messiah and say that Jesus will come again as he is the Son of Man about whom Isaiah, Daniel, Joel and other prophets from the Old Testament said that he would come “on the clouds of heaven” to judge the living and the dead at the end of time.

Waiting for the Messiah is still the religious tradition of the Jewish people, but it should not be that of Christians. Matthew, the evangelist who has taken most inspiration from the Old Testament, writes about the Son of Man coming on the clouds in the following way:

‘Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

.....

“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled.”

Matthew 24: 29-34

Christian theologians interpret Jesus’ missionary work and message on the basis of these statements about the end of time and they say that Jesus himself was looking forward to the arrival of the *Day of the Lord*.

However it is not easy to understand what Jesus meant when he talked about the end of time or the Day of the Lord, as the four gospels give us different information on the subject. For example John does

not mention anything about Jesus coming back on the clouds to judge “the living and the dead”. According to his gospel Jesus’ words concerning his death are:

*“Now is the judgement of this world;
now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself.”

.....

The people answered him, ‘We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever; and how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up?’ Who is this Son of Man?’

*Then Jesus said to them: ‘A little while longer **the light** is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.*

*While you have the light, **believe in the light, that you may become sons of the light.**”*

John 12: 31-36

These texts give us an idea how confused the people were concerning Jesus identity. They wanted to have a Christ who would remain with them for ever, but Jesus was talking about the Son of Man who would be glorified, lifted up and draw all peoples to himself. He says that he is **the light** and he exhorts the people to **become sons of the light**.

Millions of Christians are still waiting for the final catastrophe at the end of time when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead. But the question is why he should judge us. Has his death on the cross not been an act of remission of our sins? Is the teaching of the priests about Jesus’ sacrificial death an empty promise until the final “settlement” takes place? And what about Jesus’ words that “this generation” – i.e. his generation – will by no means pass away till all his predictions are fulfilled? If we believe his words then we need not fear any final devastating catastrophe as **his prophecy was fulfilled** in 70 when, during the Jewish revolt, the Romans destroyed the Temple and

drove away the Jews from Jerusalem. This was the end of time for the people of Israel who afterwards had to live in Diaspora again.

Jesus' revelation "on the clouds of heaven" should certainly not be interpreted as an event that will take place at a given time, defined in year, day and hour. The gospels of the New Testament, the Gnostic gospels as well as other texts tell us that Jesus appeared "on the clouds of heaven" already soon after the Crucifixion. He appeared for Mary Magdalena at the grave and for his other disciples at different occasions.

The *Letter of Peter to Philip*, found at Nag Hammadi, gives an account about Jesus' appearing to the disciples, whilst they were praying on the Mount of Olives:

" a great light appeared, so that the mountain shone from the sight of him who had appeared. And a voice called out to them saying: 'Listen... I am Jesus Christ, who is with you forever.'"

(from Elaine Pagel, *The Gnostic Gospels*, page 16)

For two thousand years people have given evidence of Jesus' revelations. He comes to give hope and comfort both to people alive and to those who have had "near-death"-experiences. People have given account of Jesus coming to them with love and peace.

The prophecies of the Old Testament differ in many ways from the ones in the New Testament. In the Old Testament it is always Jehovah, the LORD of the hosts or simply the LORD who threatens with the final devastation. In the New Testament, however, no connection is made between God Father and the coming tribulations. Jesus' predictions do not indicate who is behind the events at the end of time. According to his dualistic understanding of the universe there are two powers struggling against each other: the good one and the demonic, satanic one – the light and the darkness. He is sent by God, the Father to fight against the darkness, the demonic forces. His God stands only for love and atonement, never for suffering and annihilation by evil forces.

We know that Jesus' prophecies of wars and persecutions have come true much too often both at the time of the Romans and later.

Theologians and clergymen should, therefore, consider these prophecies as having been fulfilled and not wait for more destruction. By speculating about texts and combinations of numbers found in the Bible new “prophets” try to prove that the end of time is near. Sect leaders encourage suicide and other drastic measures. While the Christians of the historical Churches are horrified at these delusions, they fail to realize that the teachings of their own Church about the end of time are not much better than those of the sectarians. In the *Confessions of the Swedish Church*, for example, it says:

“Christ shall return on the Last Day in order to pass judgment and he shall awaken all the dead, and to the righteous and chosen ones he shall give eternal life, but he shall irrevocably sentence the godless humans and the devils to suffering torments.”

(Free translation from the
Confessions of the Swedish Church,
Uppsala 1944, p.62)

“The End of Time” can be interpreted as the end of certain historical periods when empires and great powers collapse and new nations emerge. Changes of this kind are frequently preceded by troubled times and lead to war and destruction. Regrettably Israel has been occupied by foreign powers several times, so the Jewish people have been through many “end of time” with different occasions. Therefore it is easy to understand why the apocalyptic descriptions occur so often in the Old Testament. The historical situation is not better during Jesus time either as the country is occupied again and so the need to warn against war and catastrophe as well as to comfort people by promising them a better future is as great as it was in the times of the Old Testament prophets. “The End of Time” can also mean that a certain religious and cultural epoch is coming to an end and something new is emerging. In the case of Jesus the end of time can be interpreted as the end of his life on earth that leads to the beginning of a new period in the history of mankind, when Christianity becomes a world religion.



“Who has bewitched you?”

John, the evangelist writes that Jesus appeared three times for his disciples after his resurrection. At his last visit he asked Simon Peter:

“Simon, the son of Jonah, do you love me’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’”

John 21: 16

Jesus sets Peter a very big task: he should take care of all those who believe in Jesus and will follow him. However, according to the information we have about the activity of Peter as a “shepherd”, he was not very successful. We can read in the *Acts* that even if he took the initiative for the first baptism of Gentiles, he is rather uncertain as for his universal mission. Paul says about him:

“But when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;

for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.”

Galatians 3:11-13

After the death of the Master different groups of disciples wanted to assert themselves. Peter, the disciple who had been unfaithful to Jesus already at the occasion of the Crucifixion, was not strong enough to live up to his call as a shepherd. Unfortunately the unfaithful spirit of Peter came to characterize also the later “shepherds” in the Church of Jesus.

Paul, a former Pharisee and persecutor of the followers of Jesus, becomes one of Peter's "rivals" – at least in the beginning of his missionary work. He appears to be more purposeful and has both knowledge and spiritual strength that bear him up. He takes responsibility for the spreading of Christianity among the Gentiles. Paul is also the first theologian who propagates "another gospel". He does not tolerate any other preaching except the gospel he had received "*through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" *Galatians 1: 11*

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach any gospel to you other than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed."

Galatians 1: 8

Paul does not ask anyone of "flesh and blood" for information about Jesus' teaching and work. He only meets the disciples who had been closest to Jesus three years after having started spreading his own gospel about the Master.

*"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace,
to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles,
I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,
nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me;
but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus."*

Galatians 1: 15-17

There is no doubt that Jesus revelation to Paul who was on his way to Damascus changed the former Pharisee's life and way of thinking of God. However, when reading his scriptures we understand that Paul was not able to get rid of his Jewish religious background, which influenced him when he formulated "his gospel". He wrote almost nothing about Jesus' teaching the people in parables and about him doing wonders. Paul concentrates on his own doctrine about Jesus as a Redeemer and he does it by giving the texts of the Old Testament a new interpretation; this way he lays the foundation for the Jewish-Christian dogmatism that eventually becomes valid in the Church of Christ.

Paul's theology is a blend of his new teachings and those of the Old Testament. As he himself had never listened to Jesus, he could not know that the Master had said:

"No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on to an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse.

Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Matthew 9: 16-17

Paul is not the only one who includes old religious traditions in the Church of Christ. Bishops and popes who are considered to be Christ's representatives on earth, do it as well, in a very careless and superficial way. So many things that Christ had fought against, as hierarchy, conformity to law, hypocrisy, strange dogmas, carnality, have become a part of the Church of Christ. Gentile symbols, for instance the phallus symbol, which is even today a popular ornament outside Catholic churches, have been taken over. Rome's many hundred church bells rang, cannon salutes thundered and Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) together with his priests celebrated mass when the old Egyptian phallus symbol was installed in front of St. Peter's Church with help of 45 cranes, 160 horses and 800 men.

Paul, the apostle could ask the same question today as he did to the Galatians:

*"... **Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?***

.....

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"

Galatians 3: 1...3

Paul does not realize that it was he who started the “bewitching” when he spread his own gospel instead of the message of Jesus. Unfortunately the process of bewitching has persisted in the Church of Christ for two thousand years.

In the beginning of the 16th century Martin Luther, together with other reformers, tried to break the “bewitchment”, but many of the old burdens remain. Now, five hundred years later, the time has arrived for ***a new Reformation***, this time on a deeper level that could perhaps liberate Christianity from its old bewitched state. The time has come to put aside texts that:

- legitimise oppression;
- teach us about a cruel and punishing God who wants to destroy his own creation;
- set up religious and profane leaders of the people from the Old Testament as examples to be followed despite of them having lived and acted like criminals;
distort the truth about Jesus and his purpose on Earth
threaten with and await the “end of time” , when the chosen ones will be saved and the others will be doomed.

Jesus, the good shepherd says in the Gospel according to John:

“...Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

John 10: 7-10

Jesus never encourages heram and war in the name of God. The key-words in his universal message are LOVE, PEACE AND RECONCILIATION. As he is the Son of God, the Father, he sees his own life and that of Man in a wider cosmic perspective.



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Robert Winston: The Story of God, Bantam Press, 2005

About the author

Eva Fogarasi Bálint belongs to the Hungarian minority of Transsylvania/Romania. She left the country during the dictatorship of Ceausescu and settled down in Sweden where she studied Theology at the University of Lund. As a clergyman in the Swedish Church she had many open discussions with laymen about Christianity and its history.

In 2005, she turned back to her Hungarian roots and now lives in Budapest.