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# **The Lost Jesus**



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## PREFACE

### **The Lost Jesus**

Why this book? Why this title? Did Jesus get lost? Did someone lose him? Many questions... Jesus often hid from the crowds and even from the apostles. His famous answer to the crowd that sought and found him was: „*Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.*” (John 6:26)

Even more famous is his answer to Mary and Joseph when they found him in the temple three days later: „*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*” (Luke 2:49)

As the author of these lines, I once wondered why Jesus spoke in such a European, Christian way. I discussed this with a missionary from the Society of the Word of God (Steyle Missionare) almost three decades ago. His answer was that it was not Jesus who spoke in this way; it was the Church that speaks in this way. This had confused me and he explained: „I have to read the press and watch television to know what people feed on spiritually, what “language” they understand, how they “breathe” – and then adapt the gospel to their level so that they can accept it: in Europe, European, in Africa, African, etc. Anything else would be a futile undertaking.“ I replied that if I watch TV and read the press, I even lose the little bit of Jesus that I think I have in me. „Then look for Him in the places and times where and when He lived!“ he said.

So I studied the Bible, Jewish history and the beginnings of Christianity, and traveled to Israel. Many years have passed, the media have changed for the worse, the Christian parties in the West have passed a series of anti-Christian laws, the number of

Steyler missionaries is dwindling, as are many others. Christianity is increasingly becoming a cultural tradition without content or meaning. The leaders of the main churches in the West have integrated themselves better into the new regimes and their forms of government than any migrants. In the process, Jesus has been lost somewhere. Christianity, or rather its preachers – honour to the exceptions! – has become a resounding ore or a noisy cymbal. Some ambitious governments are trying to return appropriated and stolen cultural property to the peoples from whom it was taken. That would be good if it were not hypocritical and used as a fig leaf for even more ideological alienation and material exploitation. But the so-called Christian West has been nothing but hypocrisy from the beginning, especially when it comes to Jews and Israel. It would be good to give Jesus back to the Jews and then study him again.

Jesus said, „*You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye!*” As a devout Catholic, I have tried to follow this advice in these chapters. First, Jesus must be given back to the Jews, to whom He belongs both divinely and humanly; then one must look at the minds of Jesus and His contemporaries, and finally judge what the second and third generations of Christians, who had broken away from the Jews, have made of it. The results are devastating. As a devotee of Jesus and His people, I owe it to myself and to other Catholics to remove the beam from ‘the Catholic eye’. No, it is not about criticism or self-criticism, because these are only sufficient if one makes only minor mistakes along the way, but the direction itself is right. Removing the beam is a fundamental liberation of the ‘catholic eye’ from the accumulation of traditions, empty phrases and falsifications. It is a cry that is intended to make *the scales fall from the eyes* of Catholic clergy and allow them to see clearly again. Without belittling the vocation to the priesthood, on the contrary, it is with the deepest respect that these chapters were written so that priests

can learn what they unfortunately did not hear during their studies. I considered it my duty and obligation to Jesus and the Father who sent him to write the following chapters.

The author



## Christmas

There is no official record of the birth of Jesus, so Christianity faced a problem in determining the date of his birth. Throughout history, priority has been given to various relevant factors, and so Christmas was celebrated as early as 19 April, 19 November and finally, it was agreed that it would be celebrated on 25 December. Numerous theologians, historians and chroniclers argued in favour of this date, but there were just as many opponents, because on that day pagan gods were once worshipped and festivals of natural religions celebrated.

Well, biblically and from the Jewish point of view, the mysteries of the divine plan and the birth of Jesus point to this very date. Every event concerning Jesus is based on a biblical prediction, whether in the prophets, psalms, festivals or customs; it is only a matter of searching and discovering. Jesus himself reprimanded the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: *Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!* (Luke 24:25)

So, to understand the deeper meaning and justifiability of the current dates of the birth of Jesus and the Annunciation, we have to go back to the first pages of the Bible and then take a closer look at some significant events in Jewish history and certain holidays.

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel.* (Genesis 3:15)

Of course, this is not about the snake, the heel and snake venom, but about evil, the devil and his poison of lies and death, because, as Jesus said, he is a liar and the father of lies from the beginning.

One of the fateful events for the existence of the Jewish people took place during the reign of King Ahasuerus and is described in the Book of Esther. This book has only a few pages and everyone should read it to understand the deep symbolism that points to 25 March as the day of the Annunciation.

Haman, the royal adviser at the time, exalted himself to a minor god and demanded that people kneel before him. Everyone obeyed his orders, except for Mordecai, because he was Jewish and as such he worshipped only God. Let us recall Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and his words to the devil: *At this, Jesus said to him, „Get away, Satan! It is written:“ The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.*“ (Matthew 4:10) Enraged with Mordecai and determined to take revenge, Haman persuades the king to write an edict ordering the annihilation of all Jews. The king's wife, Queen Esther, who is Jewish – but no one except Mordecai knows this – fasts and prays, then goes before the king, risking her life. But a miracle occurs: the king receives her and, over the course of a few days, she succeeds in opening the king's eyes to the deviousness of Haman. The Jews are pardoned, but Haman and his relatives suffer the same death that they had intended for Mordechai, on the very day that Haman himself had drawn for the extermination of the Jews. Esther's courage, prayers and love for her people crushed the head of Haman and saved her people from imminent destruction; similarly, centuries later, Mary's *‘let it be done unto me according to thy word’* again brought about the salvation of the Jews.

Every year on the 13th of Adar, Purim (the plural of Pur – the lot) is celebrated in honour of Esther. Every few years, the 13th of Adar and the 25th of March (Annunciation) fall on the same day. Why not every year? The reason for this lies in the Jewish calendar, which differs from the Islamic and Christian calendars. In obedience to God's commandments, the Jews adhere to the divine prescription for calculating time: Then *God said: „Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night.*

*Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years, and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth. “ And so it happenend: God made the two great lights,the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night; and he made the stars. (Genesis 1:14-16)*

It is therefore God's will that the sun and moon be used to calculate the calendar (holidays, days and years). This is not the case with the Christian calendar, which is independent of the moon, nor with the Islamic calendar, which is independent of the sun. The solar year lasts 365 days and 5.9 hours, the lunar year 354 days and 8.8 hours; so the Islamic year is 11 days shorter than the Christian year. To bring their calendar year into line with the astronomical year, Christians add an extra day every four years (29 February). For this purpose, the Jews introduced the cycle of nineteen years in which twelve normal years with twelve months alternate with seven leap years with thirteen months. This is also the reason why Purim and the Feast of the Annunciation do not fall on the same day every year, but only when the Christian and Jewish adaptations of the calendar to the astronomical year coincide.

Logically, Christmas is celebrated nine months after the Annunciation. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (John 1:9) *Jesus spoke to them again, saying, „I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.“ (John 8:12) I came into the world as light , so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness.*

Every year in winter, Jews celebrate the eight-day festival of Hanukkah. This is the festival of the consecration of the Temple, of light, of the lighting of the lights. It has been celebrated since 164 BC. The origin of this festival is described in the Bible in the First Book of Maccabees, which we recommend that everyone read. The holiday commemorates the day when the Maccabees

liberated Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple of the Greek gods, and removed the defiled and desecrated altar; they threw the altar's desecrated stones out of the Temple *They stored the stones in a suitable place on the temple hill, until a prophet should come and decide what to do with them.* (cf. 1 Maccabees 4:46)

The actual reason for celebrating the Dedication and Festival of Lights was the miracle of the consecrated oil. This is how the great Jewish theologian and philosopher Rambam recounts the events: *„It happened on 25 Kislev. They entered the Temple and found no kosher oil except in one vessel, but there was no more than a day's supply in it. With it, the lamps were kept burning for eight days until the olives were pressed and new oil was available. Therefore, the rabbis of that generation decreed that the eight days from the 25th of Kislev should be observed as days of joy and celebration. On these eight days, we light candles at night in front of our house doors to publicly commemorate this miracle. These days are called Hanukkah; during this time, funeral speeches and fasting are forbidden, just like on Purim."*

On Purim and Hanukkah, fasting is forbidden and joyful celebration is required: on Purim for one day, on Hanukkah for eight days. Christians also celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation for one day, like Purim, while Christmas is celebrated for eight days, like Hanukkah; all these days are days of joy and celebration. Like the Annunciation and Purim, Hanukkah and Christmas also fall on the same days every few years.

In Judaism, every event has a certain symbolism that points to an event in the future. For example, the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist points to the Christmas event. The Gospel of Luke tells of Zechariah's priestly service in the temple, of the offering of incense in the Holy of Holies, and of the crowd that prayed throughout. This scenario took place every year on Yom Kippur. On the day that God Himself had appointed as a day of repentance, fasting and forgiveness, the priest on duty in the Holy of Holies, between the incense altar and the Ark of the Covenant,

often received a divine revelation. The Evangelist Luke describes it as follows: *Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained unable mute.* (Luke 1:21-22) If this took place on Yom Kippur, which is celebrated on the first day of the month of Tishri (the word comes from the Aramaic and means forgiveness, pardon), then John was born in the month of Tammuz, which in many years corresponds to our June. Yom Kippur is a day of fasting, prayer and repentance; but that was precisely the task of John: to call people to repentance and to prepare the way for Jesus.

All this clearly proves that the Christian holidays were neither chosen at random nor based on or developed from pagan festivals, as some theologians and historians assume. The fact that we are rooted in the history of the Jewish people – the people of Jesus – in this respect as well can only edify us as believing Christians.

## The Birth

In the chapter about Christmas, the topic was the dating of Christian holidays. Here, we will now talk about people and events. Christmas is associated with countless customs, stories, plays, nativity scenes...

Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Bethlehem always come off badly in this, because they are portrayed as hard-hearted, selfish, and inhospitable, and all because Joseph and Mary could not find shelter with them and Jesus was therefore born in a stable. But is this really true? If we read the Gospel of Luke, who is the only one to describe the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, we come to a different conclusion. Nowhere does he mention that Joseph and Mary asked anyone for shelter, which would have been logical since they had just arrived and needed a place to stay. It is written, *While they were there...* (Luke 2:6a) and not *When they arrived there...*, which means that they had already been in Bethlehem for some time, so they must have had a place to stay. It should be noted that Bethlehem was the city of King David's family, from which Joseph also descended, and so he certainly had property, relatives or acquaintances there with whom he could find accommodation. This is also suggested by verse 2:11 in the Gospel of Matthew: *On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother.* So Joseph and Mary certainly had accommodation in Bethlehem; incidentally, they could also have found shelter with Mary's relative Elizabeth in Ein Kerem, which was about an hour's walk away.

So how did it happen that Mary was suddenly taken by surprise by labour pains and didn't make it to either her accommodation or Elizabeth's house, but only to one of the local inns, which were full at the time, or to the sheepfold? There are several explanations as to why the inn was full; one of them is that many people from

the tribe of Judah and the line of David were staying in Bethlehem to register. A second, more obvious one, is that the registration took place during the Hanukkah season, when people from all over Israel flocked to Jerusalem. Since many of them did not have the opportunity to bring their sacrificial lambs with them, they went to nearby Bethlehem to buy flawless lambs from the local shepherds so that their sacrifice would be accepted by God. Perhaps Joseph and Mary were also on their way to the shepherds to get a sacrificial lamb, and somewhere near a shepherd's shelter, Mary went into labour and she *gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.* (Luke 2:7) All of this suggests that the scenario surrounding the birth of Jesus was no coincidence, but God's plan, full of symbolism. The key to the Christmas drama is in the divine revelation to the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is close to Jerusalem and was therefore suitable for keeping flocks of sheep for the needs of the Jerusalem Temple. The tradition of keeping sheep goes back to King David, who was himself a shepherd before he became king. So the shepherds were grazing their flocks, and pilgrims from the diaspora and from more distant places were buying lambs from them to offer as sacrifices at the Temple. However, in order to be offered as a sacrifice, the sheep had to be flawless, without the slightest blemish or injury, because otherwise no one would have bought them and the shepherds would have been left without their wages. It is therefore understandable that *there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.* (Luke 2,8) With ordinary herds the shepherds did not watch at night; they left this to the dogs, which would bark to alert the sleeping shepherds to any danger. So why did these shepherds watch? The reason for this is the already mentioned flawlessness of the lambs: *The Lord said to Moses, „Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites, and tell them: When anyone of the house of Israel*

*or any alien residing in Israel, who wishes to offer a sacrifice, brings a holocaust as a votive offering or as a free-will offering to the Lord, if it is to be acceptable, the ox or sheep or goat that he offers must be an unblemished male. You shall not offer one that has any defect, for such a one would not be acceptable for you.*“ (Leviticus 22:17-20) To ensure flawless lambs and thus their reward, the shepherds had to separate the male lambs at night when ewes gave birth, and care for them separately from the flock. In order to prevent them from hurting themselves on thorny bushes, they were wrapped during the first few weeks. The angel announced the good news to the shepherds who were watching over and swaddling the newborn lambs, saying, „*And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.*“ (Luke 2:12)

The entire history of salvation is contained in this announcement, both of Israel and of all humanity, from the exodus from Egypt to the Revelation of John of the end of this world. Just as the blood of the lambs on the doorposts of Israelite dwellings protected the firstborn of Israel from death during the first Passover meal, so the blood of the lambs sacrificed in the Temple of Jerusalem freed from the penalty of sin, and the same is done by the blood of Jesus - the Lamb of God - shed on the cross. And so, when all this has passed away and the heavenly Jerusalem descends to this earth, the saved will praise God and his Lamb: *Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.* (Revelation 22:3) The Lamb will be discussed in a separate chapter, but now we return to the shepherds, for whom the message of the angel was perfectly understandable, for they too wrapped their lambs to protect them from injury. So this is the reason for Jesus' birth in a stable, and not the hard-heartedness of the inhabitants of Bethlehem. The poor inhabitants of Bethlehem! How many undeserved condemnations have rained down on them over the centuries, both



from the mouths of small children and from the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries.

Before turning to the wise men from the East, let us recall the words of Jesus: *At that rvery moment he rejoiced in the holy Spirit and said, „I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for althought you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.“* (Luke 10:21) In our case, the little children are the shepherds to whom it was revealed, but the wise and understanding are the Magi. There is no nativity scene today without the ‘Three Wise Men’, these wise men who came to worship the newborn King of the Jews and to offer him gifts. All kinds of fantasies are woven around these mysterious people: they were astrologers, wise men, kings; at first their number was unknown, then there were seventy, finally only three. The Christian people liked the idea of the mysterious, learned, powerful men so much that they eventually turned them into ‘the three holy kings’ and dedicated a special day of remembrance to them: the Epiphany. Well, they were neither holy nor powerful, nor did God reveal himself to them, which becomes clear if you read the Gospel of Matthew carefully.

In the original Greek, these men are referred to as magicians from the East, the same term used for Simon the Magician in the Acts of the Apostles. (cf. Acts 8:9) At that time, the pagan world was full of such magicians, self-proclaimed sages, astrologers and fortune-tellers. God had forbidden the Israelites to engage in such activities: *„Do not practise divination or soothsaying“* (Leviticus 19:26b) *„Do not go to mediums or consult fortune-tellers, for you will be defiled by them. I, the Lord, am your God.“* (Leviticus 19,31) Matthew does not mention a single word about God revealing Himself to the Magi, but only that their information was based on astrology. Moreover, their horoscope does not lead them to Jesus in Bethlehem, but to Jerusalem, to his archenemy Herod. Only after he had consulted the priests and scribes did he, and

with him the Magi, learn where the new king was to be born. The Magi leave Jerusalem, find Jesus in the house - not in the stable! - pay homage to him and present him with gifts.

What is the background to this? For the Magi, Jesus was neither the Messiah nor the Son of God. They saw him as the future king and hastened to be the first to recognise this, possibly in the hope of later obtaining honourable positions in his court. Then, as now, there were many who found a lucrative source of income from horoscopes and predictions made to gullible rulers and rich people. And now follows an important sentence: *And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.* (Matthew 2:12) After that comes: *When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, „Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.“* (Matthew 2:13) It will not have escaped the attentive reader that it is not clear here who warned the Magi, while we know very well who told Joseph to flee, and only that is the true revelation of God in this whole matter.

Let us imagine what would have happened if the Magi had returned to Jerusalem and told Herod about Jesus' whereabouts. Herod would have sent his men with orders to kill the child, but they would no longer have found anyone there because Joseph and Mary, warned by God, would have been on their way to Egypt with the child. The royal guards would have returned empty-handed and the lives of countless children would have been spared. This raises the question of which star and whose nocturnal instructions the Magi were following, since it all ended with the bloodbath of innocent children. So much for the birth of Jesus, in the hope that this chapter will help to erase the undeserved disgrace that the inhabitants of Bethlehem have suffered at the hands of the brave Christians for 2000 years.

## Circumcision and Baptism

Jesus was circumcised as a child and baptised as an adult. It is common knowledge that circumcision is part of the Jewish faith; however, it is less well known that baptism is also deeply rooted in the life of the Israelite community, and has been since the covenant at Sinai. The reason for this lack of knowledge is that when we hear the word baptism, we have the image of our Christian baptism in mind, in which a few millilitres of water are sprinkled on the head of the baby to be baptised, while certain prayers are said. But it wasn't always like that; let's proceed chronologically and start with circumcision, and then come back to baptism.

God ordered circumcision when he made the covenant with Abraham: *God also said to Abraham, „On your part, you and your descendant after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me. Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised, including houseborn slaves and those acquired with money from any foreinger who is not of your blood. Yes, both the houseborn slaves and those acquired with money must be circumcised. Thus my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting pact. If a male is uncircumcised, that is, if the flesh of his foreskin has not been cut away, such a one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.“* (Genesis 17,9-14) From this we can clearly conclude that the uncircumcised do not participate in God's eternal covenant with Abraham. They are not counted among the descendants of Abraham, for God says explicitly: ‘An uncircumcised male, any male who is not

circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant.'

Jesus Himself also mentions the importance of circumcision and says that it is more important than the Sabbath rest, which was enjoined on Moses for all Israel, because every newborn must be circumcised on the eighth day, even if that day is a Saturday. Jesus emphasises here that circumcision is not from Moses, but from the fathers, that is, from Abraham, and with that He refutes all arguments of those who claim that every circumcised person must keep all Jewish commandments, prohibitions, regulations and traditions. *Moses gave you circumcision - not it came from Moses but rather from the patriarchs - and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man can receives circumcision on a sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a whole person well on a sabbath?* (John 7:22-23) We know that Abraham circumcised his son with Hagar, Ishmael, when he was 13 years old; he himself was circumcised at the age of 99 and his son with Sarah, Isaac, on the eighth day after his birth.

The descendants of Ishmael (Muslims) are still circumcised at the age of puberty, while the descendants of Isaac (Jews) are circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Christianity abolished circumcision for certain reasons a few decades after Jesus' ascension to the Father. Yet circumcision is a covenant with God that is made in blood and a sign on the body that remains for eternity. Jesus was circumcised as a child, baptised as a circumcised person, preached, was crucified, resurrected, ascended to the Father and will return as a circumcised person.

This is what God said to Abraham: „*My covenant, the sign of which you have on your flesh, shall be an everlasting covenant.*“

Circumcision is an important and joyful family celebration for both, Jews and Muslims. In Jewish families, a place is always kept free in case the prophet Elijah comes, so that when he comes and sees that there is still faith in Israel, he will announce the Messiah.

Once, some time after the transfiguration on the mountain, Jesus said to the three apostles: Then the disciples asked him, „*Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?*“ *He said in reply, “Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.* (Matthew 17,10-13) It is not impossible, on the contrary, it is quite likely that at the circumcision of Jesus, this very Elijah (John), of whom Jesus speaks here, was present. Ain Kerem is not far from Bethlehem, and it is hard to imagine that Joseph and Mary would not have invited their relative Elizabeth, with her husband Zechariah and six-month-old John, to such a celebration. So here too the scriptures were fulfilled that foretell that Elijah will announce the Messiah. Of course, probably none of those present had any idea about this, except perhaps those who were present at the circumcision of John and heard his father's prophecy: *And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,* (Luke 1,76) Thus from the first days of Jesus' life, what was written in the scriptures and foretold by the prophets was being fulfilled.

Let us now turn to John the Baptist and his mission of renewal. In his time, the Jews were exposed to all kinds of hardships: national, economic, political. Such crises always call for prophets, apocalypticists, hermits and callers to repentance in all times and all religions. That was the case then, too. Many tried, like John, to prophesy and call for repentance, but today they are all forgotten, only John the Baptist left deep, indelible marks in Judaism and Christianity. His baptism moved masses of sinners to repentance and to honorable lives.

To understand this correctly, we have to get away from the image of today's Christian baptism. ‘Baptism’ is originally a Jewish term and translated correctly, the word means ‘bath’ or ‘immersion’. It

was commanded to the Jews by Moses on Mount Sinai. The whole book of Leviticus is full of sentences like: ... *he shall bathe himself in water and remain unclean until evening; then he shall be clean.* This bathing is nothing more than a ritual immersion in water to become ritually pure, and not a washing away of earthly dirt. This was also the baptism that John practised, whereby he called on people to confess their sins and repent. The disciples of Jesus later adopted the ritual, but with the addition: „*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*“

The Jews have many rules about how and where one can immerse oneself to become clean. These are primarily rivers, lakes, seas and springs, but also large collections of rainwater. Basins for ritual ablutions are called mikvahs and must contain at least 480 litres of water so that one can be fully immersed. Such immersion is regularly practised by women after their periods, by writers of the Bible, by ordinary people before the Sabbath and before holidays; many particularly devout Jews practise it daily. It is interesting that every convert to Judaism must not only be circumcised but also baptised, i.e. ritually immersed in water. Without these two rituals, no one can convert to Judaism.

But did Jesus need this purification? Certainly not. But why did he insist that John baptise him? On the one hand, he emphasised the importance of this Jewish ritual and, on the other hand, he fulfilled the scriptures and the prophets, because John introduced him as the Lamb of God. Even more important, however, is that the Most High confirmed him as the Son of God with his voice. In Judaism, the voice of God was the greatest possible confirmation and authentication. Over many generations, and particularly in times of crisis, the teachers of Israel heard this voice. Matthew describes the event at the Jordan as follows: *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, „I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?“ Jesus said to him in reply, „Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.“ Then he allowed him.*

*After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened (for him) and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove (and) coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, „This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.“ (Matthew 3:13-17)* Here Jesus is coming up out of the water, so his baptism was not a sprinkling with water, but a bath or immersion.

Jesus also emphasised the importance of ritual cleansing before the Last Supper with his disciples: *Peter said to him, „You will never wash my feet.“ Jesus answered him, „Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.“ Simon Peter said to him, „Master, then not only my feet, but my hands head as well.“ Jesus said to him, „Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all.“ For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, „Not all of you are clean.“ So when he had washed their feet (and) put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, „Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me `teacher` and `master` and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. (John 13:8-15)*

Obviously, neither humility nor earthly dirt is being discussed here; the foot washing stands for mutual forgiveness of injustices and insults. Therefore, the ritual of foot washing on Maundy Thursday is a little naive and distracting from the essentials.

## The Wedding at Cana and the Creation of the World

In these two, at first glance unrelated texts, one finds, when one delves deeper, a whole series of points of contact that reveal the textual coherence of the texts in relation to the realisation of the divine plan with Israel.

At the wedding at Cana, Jesus reveals himself through his first miracle and wins the first believers, but Mary also takes on a new role here. Let us begin: *On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.* (John 2:1-2) The text about the wedding at Cana begins with a strange statement of the time, and there are various speculations about what the expression 'on the third day' could refer to. The footnotes below the biblical text attempt to explain in a variety of ways what meaning or symbolism may be hidden behind it.

The only logical explanation, however, is provided by the Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide. In his book, *Are the Gospels Translated Correctly?*, he assumes that not only the Gospel of Matthew but also that of John was written in Hebrew. This is also supported by the fact that in the first Christian communities (Ebionites and Nazarenes), which were purely Jewish and therefore spoke Hebrew, only the Gospels of Matthew and John were used; the Greek versions came later, when the Gentile communities joined them. He is therefore of the opinion that John's text must be retranslated into Hebrew in order to be understood. And indeed, in Hebrew, 'third day' corresponds to Tuesday. The Jews named the days of the week after the days of creation: second day - Monday, sixth day - Friday, etc. So the wedding at Cana took place on a Tuesday. To this day, Jews celebrate their weddings primarily on Tuesdays. Why? As a



reminder of the third day of creation, and the reason for this can be found in the biblical text : *Then God said, " Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear." And so it happend: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "the earth," and the basin of water he called "the sea." God saw how good it was. Then God said, " Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and ervery kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it" and so it happend: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed - the third day.* (Genesis 1:9-13) As we can see, God saw that it was good on this third day twice, and that is one of the reasons why weddings take place on Tuesdays. The second reason lies in the symbolism of the text, which points to the complementarity of opposites: just as the mainland and the sea are different, yet belong together, for water cannot exist without the land that borders it, nor can the land without the water that gives it fertility, so too do man and woman complement each other. The third reason, however, is the fact that God, who until then had done everything alone, on the third day gave nature the ability to reproduce. With Tuesday weddings, Jews honour God and apply the Bible to the marriage bed.

Let us now return to the events at the wedding at Cana. At weddings, there should always be plenty of food and wine, which the Bible says gladdens the human heart. Now, at this wedding, the wine had run out; perhaps the host was a member of the Essenes – a religious group that was strictly rational and frugal with food and drink, or perhaps he was simply poor and did not expect so many guests. At the wedding were also Jesus and his mother. We last encountered Mary in the Gospels in the Temple of Jerusalem, when she and Joseph came to claim Jesus, who was twelve years old, and take him back home to Nazareth. *He went*

*down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51)* Mary is pragmatic; without hesitation, she leads Jesus out of the temple; she is not touched by the fact that the temple teachers see in him a child prodigy. She knows Jesus' obedience, follows the events around her and reacts wisely. This is also evident at the wedding at Cana. Mary sees the precarious situation of the host and the impending embarrassment. She knows that the day of the marriage is a great, even sacred day, a day full of joy in honour of God and the new family, and to save her hosts from the threat of humiliation, she decides to act. Although she sees that her son is currently busy with his mission, the plight of these people is now her priority, and she becomes an advocate for the first time. And not only an advocate, but also a teacher, because she instructs the servants to obey her son in everything: *When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." (And) Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."* Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, *"Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now."* Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him. (John 2:3-11) Although Jesus believes that the time for his public ministry has not yet come, he still obeys his mother, albeit reluctantly.

The water in the stone jugs was not used to wash the dirt off the

body, but for the ritual washing of the hands. Something similar can be found in Catholic churches, where there is usually a stone basin with holy water at the entrance, into which one dips one's fingers and crosses oneself, saying, 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'. Jews sprinkle a little water on their hands – similar to Catholic priests at Holy Mass – saying, 'Blessed are You our eternal God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us to wash our hands.' The aforementioned jugs were therefore ritual vessels, which is why Jesus demands that they be filled with water, which, after being taken from them, will turn into wine. The conciseness of the biblical text leads many exegetes to the false conclusion that Jesus turned several hundred litres of water into wine. But that is not the case. If you read the text carefully, you can see that Jesus says, '*Now draw*' - that is, water from the newly filled jugs. And after the water has turned into wine, it is written, *The servants who had drawn water knew it*. So the water turned into wine while the servants were serving it. The servants must have felt uncomfortable while they were serving water. But their obedience to Jesus and his mother was greater than their doubts and fears, and it was precisely this obedience that made the miracle possible. All of this is still necessary today for miracles to happen: Mary's intercession, following her advice, listening to Jesus, overcoming fear. Then miracles happen 'on the go,' as at the wedding at Cana. Jesus himself also benefited from listening to his mother's words; he acquired his first believers because of this, for his disciples believed in him, and that was the beginning of the Church.

Unfortunately, his followers later behaved differently towards his mother; they endowed her with numerous decorative epithets, such as Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Queen of the Church, Tower of David, etc., but they did not really listen to her. For centuries she has tried to save the world through her intercession, advice and prayers. She is trying, as she once tried to lead her son

out of the Jerusalem temple, to lead humanity out of the temple of vanity and hypocrisy, gold and silk, and to bring them together with their shepherds into the simplicity of the grotto of Bethlehem, into the security of the family of Nazareth.

Guadalupe, La Salette, Lourdes, Fatima are just a few of these attempts. And what happens? The successors of the apostles demand signs and wonders, they want to have seen Mary with their own eyes, they discuss whether she could or should have said what she said, not to mention the harassment to which the seers are subjected. Decades pass before Mary's requests are granted; by then, the opportunity to turn water into wine for the urgent needs of the period in question has long since been lost. Finally, everything is reduced to a few healings, the sun dancing and additional days of remembrance in the Christian calendar, but the essence of the messages disappears from the agenda and is forgotten. It is significant that Mary usually appears to simple people, often to children. Who does not think of Jesus' exclamation: *At that very moment he rejoiced (in) the holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.* (Luke 10:21)

Obviously, Mary also adheres to it. Well, maybe that's what creates confusion and possibly also arouses jealousy, because in all Christian churches, on all apostolic chairs, there are wise and clever people. Perhaps that is why things like in Medjugorje happen, a village in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Mary appeared to six children, who are now adults. Through them, she has been showering Christianity with messages, admonitions, advice and calls to prayer, fasting, reconciliation and peace for over 40 years. In the meantime, three popes and three cardinals (two in Zagreb, one in Sarajevo) have taken office, and not one of them has seen fit to go to the place of the apparitions to see what is going on there. Should not their first and most sacred duty be to

go there in person to see for themselves whether heaven might not really be at work? Instead, various emissaries are sent and commissions are set up that have been 'dissecting' and analysing the visionaries, Mary and the messages for decades. What has not been done to stop the flow of pilgrims, the spread of the messages, prayer groups and other fruits of Medjugorje! The irony of the whole matter lies in the fact that in such cases the Church appoints a devil's advocate, who is supposed to present all possible counter-arguments and thus eliminate any doubt. Paradoxically, however, it was precisely the devils who were always the first to recognise and name Jesus, while these devil's advocates appointed by the Church do exactly the opposite: they degrade, conceal and obstruct. What has been said about the high dignitaries of the Catholic Church also applies to the dignitaries of all other Christian churches, for they all have the same Gospels, the same Cana, the same Mary – and thus also the same duties to accompany, to examine and to act upon events relevant to their faith.

We would like to show here what would happen if the dignitaries of the Christian churches took just one of Mary's messages seriously and encouraged the faithful to follow it. Among other things, Mary called for fasting on bread and water for two days a week. If the church leaders had accepted this and obliged the faithful to do so, at least 1 billion of the 2.5 billion Christians would have followed it. If we leave aside the spiritual benefits of fasting, let us consider only the material consequences. If we exclude Christmas and Easter, there are 50 weeks, or a hundred days of fasting a year for this 1 billion believers. We take the average global consumption of some foodstuffs as a statistic and calculate the savings for these 100 days of fasting. Annually, 11.2 billion kilograms less meat would be consumed, 6.5 billion kilograms less sugar, 13 billion kilograms less potatoes, 39 billion eggs, 12 billion litres less milk, more than 10 billion litres less alcoholic beverages. If believers were to donate only half of the

money saved in this way to their churches, the latter would be able to eliminate the problem of hunger in the world as well as the problem of the killing of unborn children for economic reasons. The believers themselves would get rid of many health problems: diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood lipids; heart attacks and strokes, cancer and other serious illnesses would be decimated. Billions of litres of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides would be produced less. The agricultural land thus freed up could be reforested or turned into nature parks.

These one billion Christians would change the face of the earth through their fasting, if only the church leaders would listen to Mary. But they prefer various world forums, attend conferences, congresses and symposia of followers of the 'climate religion', 'holy Greta' and other gods who think that everything is in their hands. What such church leaders do is useless work, wasted effort, preoccupation with problems that would not exist if people had listened to Mary, the mother of Jesus, just as Jesus himself and the servants did in Cana. For the wise and clever, anything is easier than heeding the simple, unspectacular recommendations of a woman who wants to give humanity a little wine - joie de vivre, health, friendship and peace. Is there such a thing as the sin of omission? Will Jesus still find faith in Christianity when he returns?

## The Jubilee Year

The Holy Year, the Golden Year, the Year of the Lord's favour, the Year of Forgiveness – these are all names for one and the same concept, which is more than 3500 years old. It has been understood and celebrated differently at different times, in different places and by different people, often in diametrically opposed ways. In this text, we will attempt to reflect on God's vision of the jubilee and on what human beings have made of it over the millennia.

On his first messianic visit to the city where he grew up, Jesus chose this text from the prophet Isaiah and read it in the synagogue: „*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*“ (Luke 4:18-19) With this text, Jesus reminds the Jews of God's instructions regarding the Jubilee, which had been somewhat forgotten due to the Roman occupation. These instructions from God, written in the 25th chapter of the Book of Leviticus, are one of the most important biblical texts of all, although they are often concealed and/or misinterpreted. In it, God regulates the secular interpersonal relationships of the Israelites and thus also of the believers of all religions that have descended from Judaism. Because of its special significance, we are including some excerpts from the chapter mentioned above: *Seven weeks of years shall you count - seven times seven years - so that the seven cycles amount to forty-nine years. Then, on the tenth day of the seventh month let the trumpet resound; on this, the Day of Atonement, the trumpet blast shall re-echo throughout your land. This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for*

*you, when every one of you shall return to his own property, every one to his own family estate. In this fiftieth year, your year of jubilee, you shall not sow, nor shall you reap the aftergrowth or pick the grapes from the untrimmed vines. Since this is the jubilee, which shall be sacred for you, you may not eat of its produce, except as taken directly from the field. In this year of jubilee, then, every one of you shall return to his own property. (Leviticus 25:8-13)*

*The land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine, and you are but aliens who have become my tenants. Therefore, in every part of the country that you occupy, you must permit the land to be redeemed. When one of your countrymen is reduced to poverty and has to sell some of his property, his closest relative, who has the right to redeem it, may go and buy back what his kinsman has sold. (Leviticus 25:23-25)*

*But if he does not acquire sufficient means to buy back his land, what he has sold shall remain in the possession of the purchaser until the jubilee, when it must be released and returned to its original owner. (Leviticus 25:28)*

*When one of your fellow countrymen is reduced to poverty and is unable to hold out beside you, extend to him the privileges of an alien or a tenant, so that he may continue to live with you. Do not exact interest from your countryman either in money or in kind, but out of fear of God let him live with you. You are to lend him neither money at interest nor food at a profit. (Leviticus 25:35-37)*

Let us take a closer look at these provisions. God wants man to live well and in freedom, for brother to save brother, for neighbour to save neighbour. This is the announcement of (restored) heaven on earth. There is no worry, no banks, no climate crisis, no hunger, no robbery, because at the latest in every jubilee year everyone gets their own land, their possessions, their freedom back. There is no thirst for ores, oil, gas, forests and water from other people; there is no need for a United Nations, there are no weapons, no wars, no tensions between nations. And



on top of that, there is God's blessing and a harvest that lasts for three to four years. However, there is one condition attached to this: God's instructions must be followed. Disobedience has consequences, which God explains in detail in several places. Here are just a few passages from the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy: *But if you do not hearken to the voice of the LORD, your God, and are not careful to observe all his commandments which I enjoin on you today, all these curses shall come upon you and overwhelm you: May you be cursed in the city, and cursed in the country! Cursed be your grain bin and your kneading bowl! Cursed be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil and the offspring of your livestock, the issue of your herds and the young of your flocks! May you be cursed in your coming in, and cursed in your going out! The LORD will put a curse on you, defeat and frustration in every enterprise you undertake, until you are speedily destroyed and perish for the evil you have done in forsaking me. (Deuteronomy 28:15-20) The LORD will strike you with Egyptian boils and with tumors, eczema and the itch, until you cannot be cured. And the LORD will strike you with madness, blindness and panic, so that even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark, unable to find your way. You will be oppressed and robbed continually, with no one to come to your aid. (Deuteronomy 28:27-29) You will live in constant suspense and stand in dread both day and night, never sure of your existence. In the morning you will say, 'Would that it were evening!' and in the evening you will say, 'Would that it were morning!' for the dread that your heart must feel and the sight that your eyes must see. (Deuteronomy 28:66-67)*

All these curses and blessings, commandments and promises were addressed to the Israelites, the people of God. But when the Christians appointed themselves as the new Israel, the new people of God, they took all the blessings, promises and redemptions for themselves, but rejected the warnings, ordinances, laws and curses for disobedience, under the pretext that God is good and forgives

them everything in Christ. They would not need works, faith alone would suffice. They would not suffer curses, only blessings! Those who propagate this teaching are like the serpent that told Eve that they would not die, but would become wise like God. The curses pronounced by God have been fulfilled on Jews, Christians and Muslims alike for thousands of years. And there is only one reason for this: DISOBEYANCE.

But back to the Jubilee years. Despite Jesus' call for Jubilees, they were neglected in Christianity for more than a thousand years. Partly because of the difficulties that befell the Christians, partly because of the growing anti-Semitism within the Church, and partly because of the beginning enrichment of church dignitaries. On the other hand, there was never a lack of serious calls to share goods with the poor and weak. St John Chrysostom was highly critical of the accumulation of wealth, claiming that salvation required sharing one's possessions with the needy, along the lines of the Jewish Sabbath and Jubilee years. St Ambrose wrote: 'You are not giving the poor anything of your own, you are only giving them back what is theirs.' In line with the Book of Leviticus, the Church Fathers often emphasised that God is the sole owner of everything in the world; man is only a guest and a pilgrim who may use God's goods, but only in accordance with His will and commandments.

Over time, Christianity gained in power, becoming a privileged religion, and with it, of course, came wealth and authority. Noble thoughts of sharing are becoming increasingly rare, while the call 'Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat' (Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands) is heard more and more frequently. In these minds, of course, Christ means the church as an institution. And when the church fights, conquers and rules, it needs money for weapons, for mercenaries, for cathedrals and palaces, for the luxury of the dignitaries. In such an atmosphere, jubilees are reconsidered. While Jesus and the Book of Leviticus talk about interpersonal relationships on this earth,

about the poor, the oppressed, the blind, the enslaved, and about the blessings for them, the church postpones these blessings to the hereafter. In this way, it evades the obligation to share its acquired goods with the needy, and on the other hand, it receives compensation for the otherworldly blessings it distributes – whether in the form of money, land, buildings or the obligation to go to war for the church.

This is where the history of the selling of indulgences begins. Crusaders who went on a military campaign to ‘liberate’ the empty tomb in Jerusalem, killing Jews along the way and looting for food, transport and shelter, received the church's indulgence from all punishments in the hereafter. The same applied to the volunteers who set out to destroy the Albigensians, a Christian movement that originated in France. If today, depending on the needs of ruling politics, an act is carelessly declared a war crime, we should remember the horrors that the crusaders committed at the time. After their defeat and the disintegration of their kingdoms in Israel, Jerusalem was occupied by Muslims, who then remained there for centuries, some to this day. After the defeat, the dignitaries of the Catholic Church tried to impose their dictate on all secular governments in the Catholic world. When that failed, they tried to invent new methods to strengthen their influence and power in the world. Christian Jubilees began in 1300 and continue at varying intervals to this day. Because of the constant need for money, the selling of indulgences was extended to include the souls in purgatory. Depending on the amount donated, the church would release a soul from purgatory or shorten its stay there for a certain period of time. When even the money from the sale of indulgences was no longer enough to finance luxury, art, wars, etc., the church resorted to selling church offices, cardinals' honours and the like. All these practices led to the schism in Christianity in the 16th century.

But back to the Jubilees. At the Jubilee celebration in Rome in 1350, at the spiritual suggestion of Christ, St. Bridget, a Swedish

woman, a widow and mother of eight children, also took part. This is how Ema Vesely describes St. Bridget's stay in Rome in her book: *Having travelled from distant Sweden, she was surprised by the difficult church conditions, poverty and ignorance in Rome. As a sign of penance, she often spent the whole day begging for alms for the poor at the door of the church of St. Lawrence in the centre of the city. But it did not stop there. In her numerous and widely accessible writings, which were based on visions and translated into Latin, Bridget spared no one. She criticised the Pope for not coming to Rome (he lived in France – author's note), she reprimanded the cardinals and bishops for their vanity and wealth, and she called the Roman clergy, who were ignorant, negligent and immoral at the time, toads and snakes that suffocated the fish in St. Peter's net – ordinary believers – because of their selling of indulgences. She also criticised the people of Rome for being concerned only with carnal pleasures and personal gain, and called their leaders murderers. Finally, the Romans had had enough of all these objections, the incessant terrible threats and prophecies about the punishments and catastrophes that would soon come upon their city, which was doomed to death and destruction. One day they could stand the accusations of the little and insignificant foreigner no longer and gathered at night with torches around the palace where Bridget lived. They threw stones and shouted: 'Witch out! Witch at the stake!' Pope Clement VI had already had two women condemned as witches burned at the stake in Avignon, and the Romans wanted Saint Bridget to follow suit because her tongue was too sharp for their ears. After the Jubilee, Bridget went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. (Ema Vesely: Povijest jubileja, p. 87, TEOVIZIJA, Zagreb 2000)*

Over the centuries, the ecclesiastical practice of jubilee years changed, with an increasing emphasis on personal penance, prayer and pilgrimage to Rome. Pope Paul VI, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, doubted the significance of the jubilee year, but

nevertheless declared 1975 a jubilee year. Surprisingly, the celebrations were a great success and the practice of proclaiming jubilee years was continued. We should also mention the Jubilee Year 2000, during which the Pope prayed for forgiveness on behalf of the Church for all sins committed by members of the Church. Among other things, forgiveness for violence against dissidents, for religious wars, for silence during the Holocaust, for insufficient commitment to preventing the killing of children in the womb, for indifference to the poor. It should be noted that this public recognition of the sins of the church was not received with enthusiasm by the middle and high clergy.

Even today, jubilee years are celebrated, in a civilised and collected manner; but what is missing is what the Book of Leviticus and Jesus speak of: the renunciation of church property and its distribution to the poor, as well as the restitution of church property acquired unlawfully or irresponsibly to the descendants of its owners. The courage and holiness of Francis of Assisi, Bridget of Sweden, Maximilian Kolbe and Mother Teresa are still lacking. This applies to all Christian denominations. Perhaps this is the reason why the number of believers is stagnating or declining, why spiritual vocations are drastically diminishing, why more and more parishes are having to merge, and why churches are being desacralised, sold or demolished. In his book, Pope Benedict XVI writes that shortly before the Romans began destroying Jerusalem, Jewish priests heard movement and noise in the temple at night and then heard several cries: 'Let's get out of here!' Is anyone experiencing something similar, for example in the Vatican, in the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in Hanover, in Canterbury or in any other religious centre in the world?

## **... but deliver us from Evil!** (Matthew 6:13)

Evil or the Evil One has many names and designations: Satan, devil, fallen angel, tempter, prince of this world, the old serpent, Asasel, Beelzebul, evil spirit, unclean spirit... Without doubt, these are spiritual beings of different ranks, endowed with different powers, but with one thing in common: to harm man, to tempt him to sin, and then to accuse him before God; for the sake of simplicity, we will refer to them call them 'devils' in the following text.

The Bible contains numerous examples of the devil's actions and the consequences of them. Let's first look at how Jesus characterised the devil: *„You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies.“* (John 8:44) With this, Jesus takes us back to the first pages of the Bible: *Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, „Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" The woman answered the serpent: „We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.“ But the serpent said to the woman: „You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of*

*them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.* (Genesis 3,1-7) One should delve into this text, for in it lies the key to understanding all the tragedies of humanity, all the suffering, illnesses, falls and deaths. And yet, on the surface, the snake is right. Adam and Eve did not die and their eyes were indeed opened! At first glance, everything is fine and there are no problems. But let's look deeper. What the snake says and what Eve sees do not appear to be contradictory. The snake praises the tree and the fruit, and Eve's gaze notes the same. In fact, there is not a single argument against eating these fruits. Except for the divine prohibition. But the enticement of being like God is worth breaking the law. This was probably Eve's line of thinking under the influence of the serpent. To be like God! How deeply ingrained it is in all of us: the desire for wisdom, for enlightenment, for greatness! It is therefore not surprising that we so often fall into the devil's traps, especially since he is so skilful at setting them, because actually everything he says to Eve is nothing more than an advertisement for a good tree.

First of all, God punishes the snake, which has surrendered to the devil as an instrument of seduction. Then he announces to Eve the pains of childbirth, the desire for the man and the man's dominion over her; what shimmered like gold just a short time before is now recognised as a hard stone: instead of health (good to eat) – birth pains; instead of visual attractiveness – desire for the man; instead of deification – submission to the man. While God punishes Eve, the devil offers her weapons to fight against the punishment, which should actually be her remedy: abortion for the pain of childbirth, homosexuality for the desire for the man, the destruction of marriage and family for the domination of the husband and father of the family. Adam also receives his punishment: torment and sweat, thorns and weeds, and finally death. Perhaps we can now better understand why Jesus calls the devil a murderer and a liar and the father of lies from the very

beginning, especially since not only Adam and Eve became his victims; by falling for his cunning, they opened the door to all people and human hearts to him.

Let us now take a look at the devil's tactics based on the Bible. In the Book of Job we find this mysterious incident: *One day, when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, „Whence do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, „From roaming the earth and patrolling it."* (Job 1:6-7)

It is not entirely clear whether Satan is listed here as one of the sons of God or as someone who has crept in among them. But it is interesting how God treats him. There is no reproach, no suspicion, only a question as an equal interlocutor. We really have to ask ourselves: do we, through our sins, give the devil so much authority before God? Even more mysterious is the vision of Zechariah, one of the last prophets of the Old Testament: *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, while Satan stood at his right hand to accuse him. And the angel of the LORD said to Satan, "May the LORD rebuke you, Satan; may the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand snatched from the fire?"* (Zechariah 3:1-2) It is amazing with what vehemence Satan undermines the authority of the high priest and the importance of Jerusalem, and thus tries to destroy Judaism. He acts with such emphasis that even the angel does not dare to oppose him, but prays to God that he may suppress the devil and his plans. Another example of how the devil wants to destroy Israel can be found in the Chronicles: *A satan rose up against Israel, and he enticed David into taking a census of Israel.* (1 Chronicles 21:1)

Whether it was an individual Jew like Job, or a high priest like Joshua, or the city of Jerusalem, or King David and his kingdom with him – their main opponent and destroyer to this day is Satan and his earthly helpers. Jesus' stay in the wilderness and part of his dialogue with the devil show us why this is so: *Filled with the*



*holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, „If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, „It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, „I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, „It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'" (Luke 4:1-8)* Let us dwell on this second attempt by the devil to harm Jesus and lead him astray. Jesus answers him with quotations from Deuteronomy. In this book, Moses recapitulates the entire journey of the Israelites with God in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 and, in addition to the Ten Commandments, mentions many more of God's laws, prohibitions and guidelines. God is forming his people, his community, his organisation; God chooses Israel as his kingdom on earth – against the kingdoms of the Girgashites, Amorites, Hittites, Canaanites, Hivites, Perizzites and Jebusites, who have turned away from him and whom God therefore leaves to be destroyed. In Jesus' time, all empires and kingdoms had also turned away from God, which is why the devil claimed all rights to their power and glory. But he is still willing to sacrifice all of that and give it to Jesus if he falls down before him. What would have happened if Jesus had given in to the devil? Nothing would have happened to him, because he is the Son of God, so the devil cannot harm him; but his mission, his task, would have failed; but it was for this task that he became human, as the angel announced to Mary: *„He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."* (Luke 1:32-33)

So that is the crux of the matter! The devil is willing to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for the kingdom of Israel, because he knows all too well that this is how he would most offend God and grieve his heart the most. He wants to become the leader and shepherd of the nation that God has shaped with so much love and care over the centuries.

Although Israel did not have its own kingdom in Jesus' time, living under the Roman occupation, the devil is astute and already recognises what Jesus later tries to explain to Pilate when he says that his kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36) So Israel does indeed have a king, Jesus, but his kingdom is not of this world. Jesus is the king who came to testify to the truth. God's truth is that Israel is truly his people and Jesus is their king. This is the ultimate truth that sends the devil into a panic because he is a liar and the father of lies. He is willing to sacrifice all the kings, emperors, presidents, prime ministers, chancellors and parliaments of this world just to get Israel. But he is losing the game he started because God remains faithful to his people. This is the devil's greatest defeat and that is why he *is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for (someone) to devour.* (1 Peter 5:8) Of course, countless questions arise here: Why? How come? Couldn't it be different? But our thoughts are not God's thoughts, God's ways are not our ways. Instead of futile questions and fruitless considerations, we should rather humbly accept the fact that all this is so because God wills it so.

Let us now turn our attention to Satan's power, his domination of individual people and the possibilities of defending oneself against his attacks. In his first letter, John states that the whole world is under the evil one; before his suffering, Jesus calls the devil 'the prince of this world' (cf. John 12:31); in the letter of the apostle Jude, it says: *Yet the archangel Michael, when he argued with the devil in a dispute over the body of Moses, did not venture to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him but said, „May the*

*Lord rebuke you!"* (Jude 1:9) All this shows us that Satan is very strong, but also that the Lord can prevent his actions. Jesus knows this and teaches us to pray: 'Our Father... lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen'

Jesus prevents Satan from working and casts the devil out of many sick and possessed people. He passes this authority and power on to his apostles, but they do not always succeed in casting out evil spirits. On one occasion, Jesus told them that their failure was due to their lack of faith; on another occasion, He said that it was only possible through prayer. The simplest and quickest way to get rid of the devil's influence is clearly to cast him out of a person. Therefore, the apostles and their disciples often used exorcisms. But it is not always harmless, as an example from the Acts of the Apostles shows us: *Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those with evil spirits, saying, „I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." When the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, tried to do this, the evil spirit said to them in reply, „Jesus I recognize, Paul I know, but who are you?" The person with the evil spirit then sprang at them and subdued them all. He so overpowered them that they fled naked and wounded from that house.* (Acts 19:13-16)

What about the expulsion of evil spirits in Christian churches today? Some of them do not practice this command of Jesus at all, some secretly, some in rare cases with specially trained persons. On the other hand, many 'sons of Skeuas' try to exorcise evil spirits on a daily basis, without the necessary knowledge, authority and power, as if it were some kind of circus attraction. So those who have received the authority and power from Jesus to cast out demons do not do so, while others who have neither power nor authority, out of naivety or ignorance, play with fire and endanger themselves and the demonised.

Let us now focus on the question of how an individual can avoid temptation, obsession and sin. God Himself confirms that this is

possible: *So the LORD said to Cain: „Why are you so resentful and crestfallen? If you do well, you can hold up your head; but if not, sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master.”* (Genesis 4:6-7) Unfortunately, despite the warning, Cain did not resist sin, and so the first human sacrifice was made by a human being out of envy.

Jesus offers us countless ways to resist evil. His Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:3-11) contains a complete and sure set of methods for resisting the devil and sin. Let us just briefly mention those people who, according to Jesus' words, are blessed: poor in spirit, sad, gentle, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness' sake, slandered and persecuted for Jesus' sake. As we can see, this is all in contrast to what is considered a good life, a strong state, a strong church today. This programme of Jesus is not heaven, but the surest way to heaven. For those who find it too difficult to get there, Jesus offers another sure way: *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.* (Matthew 25:35-36) And another, even easier offer from Jesus: *„Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple - amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”* (Matthew 10:40-42)

These are just a few of the biblical tips on how to resist evil and sin.

But what if we fail, what if we go under, what if we fall? After killing Abel, Cain complains to God that He is punishing him too harshly because he is afraid of being killed himself. And God takes pity on him and protects him with a sign against possible

murder. David confesses his sins after every fall from grace – the counting of the Israelites, adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband – repents bitterly and prays for forgiveness and a new beginning, as written in the famous Psalm 51: *A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit.*

David finds forgiveness and mercy with God. Peter weeps bitterly over his denial of Jesus. Jesus forgives him and entrusts him with the ministry of shepherding his flock. Judas Iscariot also repents of his betrayal. His outrage over his own sin is apparently so great that he does not even dare to think of forgiveness and God's mercy, but instead punishes himself with death. To the Samaritan woman, who already had five husbands and was living with a sixth, Jesus offers himself: *Jesus answered and said to her, „If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."* (John 4:10) And to the adulteress, who according to the law should have been stoned: *Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, „Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, „No one, sir." Then Jesus said, „Neither do I condemn you. Go, (and) from now on do not sin any more."* (John 8:10-11)

Jesus forgives, God forgives and fortunately sometimes people forgive too. Forgiveness is the greatest secret, the greatest power in the fight against evil. Forgiveness is a sign of greatness, a sign of strength; the one who forgives is greater than the one who is forgiven. Forgiveness is the weapon God has given to man to conquer the devil. Where there is forgiveness, there is also reconciliation; where there is reconciliation, there is peace, true peace, God's peace; not world peace, which is born of war, victory, coercion and division.

And finally, a summary of biblical instructions on how not to fall into the traps of the devil, that is, how to get up again after a fall and start over: prayer, fasting, forgiveness, reconciliation.

## The Transfiguration

The three Gospels tell of the Transfiguration of Jesus. After the baptism of Jesus, this is one of the most important events for the Apostles, for they hear the voice speaking from the clouds: *Then from the cloud came a voice that said, „This is my chosen Son; listen to him.”* (Luke 9:35)

The evangelist Luke mentions that John, James and Peter were sleeping at the time. One could conclude from this that they were lethargic, energy-less types, especially since they could not keep from sleeping even during Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, but they also slept when the women came to them with the news of Jesus' resurrection. Well, there is certainly no lethargy at play this time. The transfiguration of Jesus could only have taken place during the Feast of Tabernacles, but it is God's command to His people to eat and sleep in tabernacles during these festival days – except when it rains. This commandment is to remind them of the fact that their ancestors lived in tabernacles when they came out of Egypt. So Jesus and the three disciples go to a natural hut, not built by human hands, in a grove on a mountain. By sleeping there, they fulfilled a commandment.

Based on the customs of Sukkot, we can safely assume that they not only slept there, but also ate and drank. According to ancient tradition, Jews expect a particular heavenly guest on each day of the Feast of Tabernacles, in this order: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. In addition, the prophet Elijah, who is to announce the Messiah, is also expected on each of these days. Therefore, two places at the table are kept free for the heavenly guests each day. Knowing all this, it is not surprising that the apostles, although still drowsy, immediately knew who the two heavenly guests were who were speaking to Jesus, even though there were no photos, films or illustrated Bibles at that

time. Peter was the first to react, as he had done in many other cases: *As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, „Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying.* (Luke 9:33)

Peter was well aware of which two guests were expected in all Israelite families that day, and quickly put two and two together. Assuming that Moses and Elijah would stay longer in their company if each had their own tabernacle, he offered to build them some. Luke notes that Peter did not know what he was talking about. He may have thought that the heavenly guests would materialise and stay, as living proof of what had happened. If that was what he meant, then he really didn't know what he was talking about.

But perhaps he meant something quite different, and knew very well what he was talking about. All three synoptic gospels report that Jesus said the following a few days before the transfiguration: *„Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:27) Perhaps Peter realised that they had just witnessed the unification of heaven and earth – the meeting of the long-awaited prophet, the author of the Bible, and the Messiah – that is, the Kingdom of God. Convinced that the Messianic era had dawned, he does not understand that they only had to experience all this as chosen eyewitnesses in order to be able to bear witness to it after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Something else is interesting in connection with the transfiguration. Matthew and Mark date it six days after Jesus said that some of those present will not die until they have seen the kingdom of God, while Luke speaks of eight days in the context. This is an indication that Jesus' disciples used two calendars, which will be discussed in the chapter about the Last Supper.

John does not report on the transfiguration, but he does mention the Feast of Tabernacles in connection with an event that shows us

how much Jesus was connected to His people and rooted in Jewish tradition, but also how hard He tried to explain to His Jewish fellow human beings that it is He who will fulfil their expectations. However, he does it in a completely different way than they expected, so they are disappointed; they do not understand that the human mind is not able to fathom heavenly secrets. So what is it all about? Wine was offered as a drink offering in the Temple of Jerusalem throughout the year, but only during the Feast of Tabernacles was water poured out on the altar instead of wine. On these days, the community of Israelites prayed for water, because they believed that this was the time when God allocated the amount of water and the rainy seasons. Water was always a problem in Israel, and there was often a lack of both drinking water and rain to irrigate the fields. At the height of these celebrations and prayers, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus offers himself as the source of living water: *On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, „Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'"* (John 7:37-38) By this he was telling them that he was the one whom God had appointed as the source of living water for them. Some came to believe in him, but as always there were also sceptics who rejected him as a Galilean. Galilee was considered backward by the inhabitants of Judea and the Galileans as stubborn fools. So, because of theological disputes, the opportunity was once again missed to glimpse Jesus' mission.



## The Last Supper

If you compare the accounts of the four evangelists about Jesus' last supper, his suffering and his death on the cross, you will notice some incongruities in the individual descriptions, which may arouse suspicion in the reader. Matthew, Mark and Luke claim that Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with the apostles on the evening of the Passover festival and that he died on the afternoon of the first day of Passover; John, on the other hand, writes that Jesus died on the cross the day before the Passover, at the time when lambs were being slaughtered in Israel for the Passover meal. According to John, Jesus' last supper would not have been a Passover meal, which is contrary to the information provided by the other three gospels.

Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, also deals with this contradiction at length in his book *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, and to some extent inclines towards John's account. This is an attempt to harmonise the four accounts and thus dispel the suspicion that the authors of the Gospels got the dates wrong when it came to the most important events in the life of Jesus. According to the Biblical commandment, the Passover meal is always eaten on the night before the first day of Passover: *The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight.* (Exodus 12:5-6) *This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.* (Exodus 12,14) So they celebrated Passover and ate the Passover lamb or goat kid as long as the temple in Jerusalem stood. Since the destruction of the Temple, the Passover has been celebrated according to a modified rite.

At the time of Jesus, the Temple was still standing, and Mark writes in his Gospel: *On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, „Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?“ He sent two of his disciples and said to them, „Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, „Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there.' (Mark 14:12-15) Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:26)*

This is where the discrepancies begin. If Jesus celebrated the Passover at the same time as official Jerusalem and the majority of the Israelites, then the further descriptions of the events are not plausible. How could Jesus have been arrested and subsequently interrogated during the Passover night, when no one sits in judgement that night: neither the high priest nor the high council, neither Herod nor Pilate? This was impossible both in theory and in practice. So did the evangelists make a mistake? Did they deliberately choose the crucifixion to take place on the first day of Passover? Or is there something completely different at stake here? It is actually about something else, something that does away with the contradictions in the Gospels. In 1953, the historian Annie Jaubert claimed that two Jewish calendars existed at the time of Jesus. In 2011, the existence of two Jewish calendars at the time of Jesus was also stated by the researcher Collin Humphreys.

He was convinced that there were two dates for celebrating the Passover: the old-established Jews (a considerable minority), descendants of those Jews who had not been taken into Babylonian exile, celebrated the Passover according to the calendar that calculated the new moon and thus the beginning of each calendar month in advance; this was the so-called Jewish-

Egyptian calendar, used by a few small groups of ordinary Jews, as well as by the Samaritans, Essenes and Zealots, to which the apostle Simon apparently belonged, who is referred to as a Zealot in Luke 6:15c.

The descendants of those who returned from the Babylonian exile (the vast majority), on the other hand, followed the so-called Jewish-Babylonian calendar, in which the beginning of each month is only determined after the new moon has become visible and this has been confirmed by witnesses; this was the official calendar at that time, and the majority of the people and their leaders followed it. According to this calendar, the Passover is celebrated one day later than according to the Jewish-Egyptian calendar, according to which Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover meal. If you take this into account, then everything in the Gospels makes sense: Jesus was arrested on Thursday after the Last Supper, then sent back and forth and interrogated until he was finally sentenced to death by Pilate on Friday morning; in the afternoon he died on the cross, was pierced with a lance, taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb just at the time when the Jews who celebrated the Passover according to the official calendar slaughtered their Passover lambs.

The assumption that two calendars existed also removes any doubt as to whether Jesus' last supper was a Passover meal or not. Incidentally, nowhere in the Gospels is it mentioned on which day of the week the Last Supper took place; it is only mentioned that Jesus died on a Friday afternoon and was buried immediately because of the approaching Saturday. To understand Jesus and the Gospels, one must delve deeply into Judaism, its beliefs, customs, traditions and historical circumstances. Without this, Christianity remains superficial and Christians run the risk of being unsettled by every critic or even losing their faith.

Since two Jewish calendars have already been mentioned, it should be noted here that Christians also use two calendars: the Orthodox use the Julian calendar, while the rest of the Christians

use the Gregorian calendar. Meanwhile, some Orthodox churches have also adopted the Gregorian calendar; so, for example, an Orthodox believer who has already celebrated Christmas according to the Gregorian calendar could write a few days later that the Orthodox Christmas is approaching, as if he himself were not an Orthodox believer. Likewise, the evangelist, although himself a Jew and although no other people celebrated the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles except the Jews, could write:

*But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near.* (John 7:2) So when the evangelist speaks of the Jews in this somewhat strange way, he always means those of his fellow countrymen who followed the majority calendar.

## Trial and Condemnation

In the chapters about Christmas and the birth of Jesus, we discussed the magnificent direction of the Most High in these historical events. Here we will focus on the dramatic moments of Jesus' surrender, trial, suffering, and death. We will deal with the circumstances, events and individual participants and in doing so, we will attempt to find the answer to two fateful questions:

1. How could this happen? and 2. Was it inevitable? First, let us try to determine whether this happened according to human or divine plan and whether there was an alternative?

Even as he wandered with his disciples through the villages of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus announced his suffering and death. Matthew describes it as follows: *From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, „God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, „Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."* (Matthew 16:21-23) Then he repeats it in Galilee, as we read in Mark: *He was teaching his disciples and telling them, „The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.* (Mark 9:31-32)

Luke brings the third announcement of the Passion and Resurrection: *Then he took the Twelve aside and said to them, „Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon; and after they have scourged him they will kill*

*him, but on the third day he will rise."* (Luke 18:31-33)

John reports Jesus' words, spoken just a few days before his condemnation and suffering: *„I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name."* Then a voice came from heaven, *„I have glorified it and will glorify it again."* (John 12:27-28)

On the basis of these texts, and knowing the outcome of the whole event, we may well conclude that an inevitable necessity is inherent in the whole drama. Everything had to happen in this way so that the will of God would be fulfilled, God's name glorified and the scriptures and prophets fulfilled. At no point in his ministry, from his baptism in the Jordan to the institution of the Eucharist, does Jesus allow any deviation from this scenario; no alternatives, no half-measures. John describes this part of that evening as follows: Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it." So he dipped the morsel and (took it and) handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. After he took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, *„What you are going to do, do quickly."* (John 13:26-27) The attentive reader is left with many questions here. Was this a suggestion or even an order? Was it addressed to Judas or to the Satan within him? How can Satan enter a person in Jesus' presence when he always left the possessed when he was near Jesus? Why does Jesus, after breaking and handing out the bread, repeatedly take a piece of bread and hand it to Judas? The first time for salvation, the second time for perdition? We can only conclude one thing: Jesus did everything to bring about what happened afterwards.

According to the Gospel of John, the high priest Caiaphas was involved in the divine plan: *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, „You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish."* He did not say this on his own, but since he was high priest for that year,

*he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to kill him.* (John 11:49-53) During the course of the interrogation, Jesus deliberately gave answers that had to lead to his conviction. Pope Benedict XVI describes this in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part Two, on page 205 as follows: For the high priest and those gathered, Jesus' answer in any case fulfilled the offence of blasphemy, and Caiaphas tore his robe and cried out, „*He has blasphemed!*“ (Matthew 26:65). *The tearing of his garment, which the high priest does, is not done in agitation, but is prescribed as a sign of outrage for the officiating judge when hearing a blasphemy.* (Gnilka, Gospel of Matthew II, p. 429) The whole drama thus took place against the backdrop of divine will; everything had to be fulfilled. To penetrate deeper into this mystery, let us shed some light here on some of the people involved in the events of that time.

### **Apostle John**

At that time, there were several rabbis in Israel, each with their own circle of students. This is described in great detail in the Talmud. Usually, each of them had a 'favourite disciple'. This was usually someone who not only knew the five books of Moses and the sermons of his rabbi by heart – more or less all of his disciples knew them by heart – but he was the one among them who, in the rabbi's estimation, had best grasped the spirit of the scriptures and the teachings of his rabbi; it was out of the question that someone would have become the favourite disciple because of his young age, modesty or distinguished origin. If we look at the apostle John from this perspective, it quickly becomes clear to us why he was able to recall Jesus' sayings even decades later, as well as the prayers, conversations and disputes, of which the other evangelists do not even provide a quarter. He understood Jesus best, grasped

the meaning of his sermons and prayers, so that even after half a century it was not difficult for him to put it all into words, to publish it and make it available to the communities of Jesus that were gradually forming into a church. So much for the explanation of why John is called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (cf. John 19:26).

And now for John's biography. He comes from the wealthy and certainly also respected family of Zebedee. Some historians claim that his father supplied the high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin with fish from the Sea of Galilee. The fact that he employed labourers supports this assumption: *He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.* (Mark 1:19-20)

This connection would also explain the fact that John knew the high priest and his servants well and moved freely and unconcernedly in the courtyard of the high priest at the most difficult moments of Jesus' arrest, and also led Peter there: *Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus. But Peter stood at the gate outside. So the other disciple, the acquaintance of the high priest, went out and spoke to the gatekeeper and brought Peter in.* (John 18:15-16)

John could and must have known what was about to happen to Jesus, and also that he himself, as his disciple, was in danger of being arrested. Peter escaped arrest by three times denying that he was a disciple of Jesus, while John walked up and down in the courtyard, unconcerned, giving instructions to the gatekeeper. What is the point here?

Let us return to the initial assertion that the Rabbis' favourite disciples were those who best understood their teaching and actions. John was certainly the one who knew very well what would happen to Jesus, and yet he did not intercede with the high



priest on his behalf; nor did he persuade Jesus to hide and avoid the trial. All this does not indicate that John was indifferent or even hard-hearted, but rather that he had a deep respect for the will of God and was convinced that he must not stand in the way of that will. Even when Jesus announced his suffering in the past, John never tried to dissuade him, as Peter did. One gets the impression that he knew all along that only through Jesus' martyrdom could the resurrection take place and the Kingdom of God come. So instead of protecting Jesus from suffering and death, he and his brother James are trying to secure a privileged position for themselves in the future Kingdom of God: *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said to him, „Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” He replied, „What do you wish (me) to do for you?” They answered him, „Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.” Jesus said to them, „You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” They said to him, „We can.” Jesus said to them, „The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared.”* (Mark 10,35-40) This conversation could also be an indication that they occupied a privileged social position; they wanted to secure this for themselves in the Kingdom of God as well. But much more important than that is their foresight and their understanding of suffering and death. They know that through suffering and death one attains resurrection and glory. That is why they do not flee, do not hide and do not complain, but quietly await the end of the drama. In this context, the terms ‘cup’ and ‘baptism’ that Jesus speaks of here have a different, deeper and more complex meaning than what we understand by communion and baptism today.

In fact, James died a martyr's death, as Jesus had predicted. John,

on the other hand, was spared and blessed with a long life. Why? Perhaps because of the privilege of being able to care for Jesus' mother. Or perhaps – and this is more likely – to be an anchor in the newly emerging Christian communities, which had to contend with some aberrations and disputes. His Gospel and Epistles were written decades after Jesus' resurrection and after the death of most of the apostles, apparently out of an urgent need to preserve the essence of Jesus' mission as Messiah and Redeemer in Christianity.

### **Apostle Peter**

As surely as John was loved by Jesus, so was Jesus loved by Peter. His love, friendship and devotion came from his simple but sincere heart. It was out of love that he wanted to spare Jesus from suffering; it was out of love that he wanted to build a tabernacle on the mount; it was out of love that he lied that Jesus paid the temple tax to spare him trouble; it was out of this love that he stepped out of the boat onto the water and ran to meet Jesus; it was love that made his hand reach for the sword to save Jesus from arrest; driven by love, he jumped out the boat to get to the Risen Lord as quickly as possible when John said it was the Lord. (cf. John 21:7) Peter instinctively senses Jesus' greatness and holiness, and indeed from the very beginning of their acquaintance, when, surprised at the huge catch of fish, he falls at Jesus' feet: *When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, „Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.“* (Luke 5:8) Intuitively, he recognises Jesus as the Messiah, and however moving his words just quoted are, his confession of human helplessness in John 6:68 is even more moving: *Simon Peter answered him, „Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.“*

Peter knows that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah; but like all other Jews of that time, he hopes for a victorious Messiah, the liberator from Roman rule. Like most Jews, he ignores those parts of the

Holy Scripture that speak of the suffering and death of the Messiah. This is the reason for his efforts to prevent Jesus from suffering. And suddenly it seems to him as if the time has come, as if the moment of battle and victory has finally arrived: *He said to them, „But now one who has a money bag should take it, and likewise a sack, and one who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, namely, 'He was counted among the wicked'; and indeed what is written about me is coming to fulfillment."* Then they said, „Lord, look, there are two swords here." But he replied, „It is enough!" (Luke 22:36-38) Peter is not interested in purses or bags, but at the word sword, he pricks up his ears; these words of Jesus make his heart beat faster, he is ready for battle. Of course, he doesn't understand anything. Jesus doesn't ask for swords for the sake of fighting, but so that they can be arrested as rebels and handed over to the Romans. Jesus knows that there can be no death penalty by crucifixion without weapons, so he asks for swords to carry out his Heavenly Father's plan. But Peter, rash and brave, draws his sword at the ready when Jesus is arrested: *Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, „Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?"* (John 18:10-11)

With this sword stroke by Peter, the facts of the armed rebellion are established, but Peter, disavowed, no longer understands the world. Perhaps he later denies Jesus out of fear that he might otherwise get him into even more trouble; but perhaps he really thinks that he does not know him, this man who first calls for arms but then criticises him for using them. And then he had to meet Jesus' gaze: *But Peter said, „My friend, I do not know what you are talking about."* Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, „Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." He

*went out and began to weep bitterly.* (Luke 22:60-62)

What a school of humility for Peter! From the rebuke ‘Vade retro Satanas!’ and the failed attempt at walking on water, to the admonition ‘Put your sword away!’ and to this look of Jesus after the denial. But that is not the end. Jesus also trains Peter after the resurrection: *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, „Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, „Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, „Feed my lambs." He then said to him a second time, „Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, „Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, „Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, „Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, „Do you love me?" and he said to him, „Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (Jesus) said to him, „Feed my sheep.* (John 21:15-17)

How might Peter have felt after Jesus' threefold question? Certainly dejected, discouraged and indecisive. And yet Jesus entrusted the care of his flock to this Peter. Peter, still not fully in control of his senses, asked when he saw John: *„Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, „What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me.*" (John 21:21-22) Perhaps Peter was trying to suggest to Jesus that He should entrust the care of the flock to John, whom Jesus loved and whom Peter certainly considered the wiser and more competent of the two. But Jesus' reply was both disapproving and enigmatic. In the end, Peter assumed the leading role and it was on his initiative that Matthias was accepted into the community of apostles in place of Judas. But Peter only fully attained his leadership role when the Holy Spirit descended on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection. From that day on, he boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, healed the sick, preached, baptised, encouraged people; he fulfilled the task that Jesus had entrusted to him completely.

### **Apostle Judas Iscariot**

Judas Iscariot is, after Adam and Eve, certainly one of the most tragic figures in the history of mankind. Adam and Eve brought death into the world for all future generations. Nevertheless, the Church sings at Easter: „O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!“ So the sin of Adam and Eve is credited with the merit of Jesus' coming into our world.

Centuries before Judas sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, another sale took place, the main character of which bore the same name and was one of the twelve sons of Jacob; the victim was his brother Joseph, the price was twenty pieces of silver. *Judah said to his brothers: „What is to be gained by killing our brother and concealing his blood? Rather, let us sell him to these Ishmaelites, instead of doing away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh.“ His brothers agreed. They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Some Midianite traders passed by, and they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and took him to Egypt. (Genesis 37:26-28)* After much suffering and imprisonment, Joseph becomes the second most important and most powerful man in Egypt. Decades later, his brothers come to him in Egypt to buy grain in order to survive, but they do not recognise him. Joseph recognises them immediately and puts them through many tests, but in the end he reveals himself to them: „Come closer to me," he told his brothers. When they had done so, he said: „I am your brother Joseph, whom you once sold into Egypt. But now do not be distressed, and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here. It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you. For two years now the famine has been in the land, and for five more years tillage will yield no harvest. God, therefore, sent me on ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So it was not really you but God who had me come here;“ (Genesis 45:4-8a) Here it is Joseph himself who proclaims before his brothers: ‘O happy fault!’ We

repeatedly see a drama and the divine direction behind it. Let us now return to the tragedy of Judas Iscariot: *Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, „What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?“ They paid him thirty pieces of silver.* (Matthew 26:14-15) What prompted Judas to this sale? Perhaps he did not believe that Jesus was the true Messiah because at that time there were several people who claimed this title for themselves. It would therefore be quite plausible that Judas doubted Jesus and therefore went to the priests to get clarification. To this day, every church requires its believers to turn to the church leaders in cases of doubt and to follow their advice. Judas never expected that his actions would lead to Jesus' death: *Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, „I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.“ They said, „What is that to us? Look to it yourself.“ Flinging the money into the temple, he departed and went off and hanged himself.* (Matthew 27:3-5) Perhaps he even believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but found him too indecisive and wanted to force him, as it were, to reveal his power and glory before the priests and elders, so that all would believe in him. A third possibility is that he was assigned the role of betrayer without his knowledge, so that the scriptures and the prophets would be fulfilled: *After he took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, „What you are going to do, do quickly.“ (Now) none of those reclining at table realized why he said this to him.* (John 13:27-28)

These words of Jesus suggest that Judas was only an instrument in God's hands. But if Judas was only playing the role assigned to him, why did Jesus say: *„The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.“* (Matthew 26:24) Was Jesus referring to Judas' stubbornness in these words, since after returning the money and

showing obvious remorse, Judas had no faith in divine mercy and committed suicide? Or did he perhaps have in mind the hundreds of future generations who would be outraged by Judas, but would consider themselves righteous and holy, even though they would sell Jesus again with every sin? Or did he say this because he knew that for Christians, the name Judas would become a symbol for the entire Jewish people, who would be condemned, mistreated and persecuted for thousands of years because of it? For the time being, that remains Jesus' secret. If Judas was acting under divine guidance, however, then it remains to be seen whether the Church will one day sing about his guilt as well: 'O happy guilt that, through condemnation, cross and death, has earned us resurrection and salvation'. It is sad that Judas Iscariot is still considered by countless Christians to be a synonym for all Jews as a traitor and deicide.

But Jesus chose two apostles named Judas: *When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called a Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.* (Luke 6:13-16) Unfortunately, this second Judas, apostle and author of an epistle, is treated as if he had never existed. Yet precisely the critics of the Jews should study his epistle carefully. The same Jude, namely, asks Jesus a question to which he receives a wonderful answer: *Judas, not the Iscariot, said to him, „Master, (then) what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?“ Jesus answered and said to him, „Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.“* (John 14:22-23) Blessed are those who, together with Judas, hear this answer and take it to heart.

### **Pontius Pilate, Roman governor**

Pilate administered Judaea in the name of Rome and had his seat in Jerusalem. He was a cruel ruler, as this extract from the Gospel testifies: *At that time some people who were present there told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.* (Luke 13:1)

Pilate killed the pilgrims of Galilee as they were offering their sacrifice in the Temple, thereby not only committing a serious crime but also desecrating the Temple. The Jews sent delegations to Rome several times complaining about his cruelty, but there was little use in this; Pilate, in return, tried to turn against them wherever he could. He saw such an opportunity when the leaders of the Jews brought Jesus to him and demanded his death sentence. It was obvious to him that Jesus was innocent, so he wanted to spite the Jews even more by releasing Jesus. But in doing so, he made a crucial mistake. Even before the verdict, he offered them Jesus alongside Barabbas for their pardon. In doing so, he prejudiced the outcome of the trial, because he offered Jesus as if his guilt had already been proven and he had already been condemned. Now the Jews, incited by their leaders, thwarted Pilate's plan and demanded Barabbas. Now Pilate was in a tight spot: if he released Jesus, the Jews would ask why he had put an innocent man up for release, but there were no valid arguments for finding him guilty. He tried to wriggle out of the precarious situation and said: „*Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law.*" *The Jews answered him, „We do not have the right to execute anyone,*" (John 18:31) The Jews therefore refuse and, on top of that, threaten to complain to the emperor because Jesus is claiming to be a king and thus rebelling against the emperor. This threat was successful; Pilate condemned Jesus to death and washed his hands of the matter: ‘When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar had started, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.



*When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, „I am innocent of this man's blood. Look to it yourselves." And the whole people said in reply, „His blood be upon us and upon our children."* (Matthew 27:24-25)

Why did Pilate finally act this way? Out of fear for his job? Because of the Roman understanding of democracy? Because of ignorance of the criminal procedure? Or under the influence of the director, who wanted the scriptures and the prophets to be fulfilled?

God once hardened Pharaoh's heart, so why not Pilate's? So let's summarise: the Jews considered Jesus guilty, not of his actions but of his words; according to the high priest, he had blasphemed God and therefore deserved the death penalty. So they could have killed him with the sword or stoned him, as they did to many a prophet before him and to Stephen later on, at the instigation of Paul. But divine providence had something else in mind: Jesus had to hang on the cross, like that brazen snake of Moses that became a salvation for the poisoned Jews. For that, the Romans were needed, because the Jews were not allowed to crucify anyone. All brave Christians who blame the Jews for the historical collective guilt of Jesus' death should take this to heart. That would be the end of this chapter, about the crucifixion itself, the death and resurrection will be discussed separately.

## The Blessed Virgin Mary

In a then unknown place in a backward Jewish province, a simple girl from the people was visited by an angel whose greeting seemed unusual: *And coming to her, he said, „Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.”* (Luke 1:28) At that moment, the history of Israel and thus of all humanity was reoriented. Luke the Evangelist describes the continuation of the conversation as follows:

*But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, „Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, „How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, „The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, „Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.* (Luke 1:29-38)

The girl probably did not understand the significance of these words, but since she had the blessing of the people of Israel in mind and placed her full trust in God, she made herself available to God without argument. The mere idea that her son would rule over all Israel filled her with bliss. But Mary did not indulge in dreams, but hurried to the relative mentioned by the angel. She

hopes to receive confirmation there that her experience was not a dream, not a figment of her overactive imagination. She confides in no one, neither her fiancé nor her family, and certainly not the community elders, because she knows very well that she would then be subjected to an interrogation that would be tantamount to torture. She is certain that she would lose the grace she has found with God as a result, and so she hurries to the Jewish hill country to Elizabeth. There she receives the confirmation she has longed for, that her experience was not a delusion but real: *When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, „Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”* (Luke 1:41-45)

Imagine what would have happened if Mary had gone to the priests instead of to Elizabeth. How many interrogations and hearings she would have had to endure; people would have demanded signs and wonders and would have argued about whether God can or may do this or that. The result would be a confused, doubting, insecure girl, an unrealised dream of Israel and all of humanity, a missed opportunity for redemption and another wait for a new Mary.

After Elizabeth's greeting, Mary is filled with the Holy Spirit and she praises the Lord, applying the praise of Hannah from the first book of Samuel to herself. She is now certain of divine intervention, helping Elizabeth in her pregnancy and learning from her. However, her silence gets her into trouble when she returns to Nazareth, because Joseph wants to dismiss her. But God does not allow it; he sends his angel and he informs Joseph in a dream that Mary is the chosen one, who became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Would Joseph have believed her if she had told him

right after the conception? What husband would have believed his wife! Here we see again Mary's wisdom, knowing full well that by her silence she would force God to act.

But Mary can also speak resolutely and act. She purposefully leads Jesus, who wants to be in his father's house, to his mother's house – to her house. Joseph remains silent, Jesus obeys. For her sake, Jesus performs his first miracle at Cana, although his time has not yet come. This is where their paths part; Mary returns home to Nazareth, while Jesus and his disciples set out on a journey through the villages of Israel. During the three years of his teaching ministry, he did not want to receive them, because what kind of shepherd would he be if he had not also set an example for them in what he asked of his disciples – namely, to leave their families if they wanted to follow him. It was only on the cross that mother and son met again; Mary is silent. Jesus entrusts the favourite disciple to her; Mary is silent. Jesus dies; Mary is silent. What was going on in her heart and soul at that time is brought to life for us in the following poem.

Eugenija Sah  
STABAT MATER

*To what can I liken or compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? What example can I show you for your comfort, virgin daughter Zion?*

*For great as the sea is your downfall; who can heal you?*

(Lamentations 2:13)

– Do not collapse, oh mother, stay upright!  
This is Your hour and the hour of Your Son! –  
So Sheol seems to summon, to implore,  
her heart is pounding, burning in distress.

The hammerblows of Golgotha –  
like obtuse blows coming from Hades –

her heart is melting, vanishing,  
 the whole cold cosmos seems to crush her now.  
 When she was offering her first-born in the temple,  
 a trembling seized her soul for the first time,  
 as Simeon, in her son the Savior recognizing,  
 announced to her: a sword would pierce your heart in days to  
 come.

This was already the first hammerblow.

– Do not collapse, oh Mother, stay upright!  
 This is Your hour and the hour of Your Son! –  
 So Sheol seems to summon, to implore,  
 and seven swords, piercing her heart,  
 are going deep, and deeper, ever deeper ...

On Calvary resounding hammerblows -  
 like the sharp ache that made the Prophet cry.  
 She is upright, crushing the dragon's head -  
 the cherub no more needs to stand in front of paradise.  
 The hammerblows are piercing her maternal heart,  
 the heights above are trembling with dismay,  
 beneath her a volcano raging,  
 the earth is roaring,  
 the univers vibrating  
 while hammerblows are shattering her dying heart.

-Do not collapse, oh Mother, stay upright!  
 This is Your hour and the hour of Your son! –  
 So Sheol seems to summon, to implore.  
 Her heart, exhausted and worn down, is beating on and on...

He's hanging on the wooden cross and dies;  
 the earth is mourning, shrouded in deep darkness.  
 But she – the Mother – she is not yet dead!

She is still standing upright, as if petrified,  
                   her eyes are not yet broken,  
 although the lance has pierced her heart as well.

Where is a heart wounded like hers?

Where is a pain so tearing and so sharp?  
 On the altar with Him, she's also burning;  
           only one thought alleviates her pain:  
           she's suffering for millions of people,  
           which He is carrying in His noble heart.

- Do not collapse, oh Mother, stay upright!  
 This is Your hour and the hour of Your son! –  
       So seems Sheol to summon, to implore,  
 wishing to decorate her with VICTORIA Crown.

It's finished...

          The stones broke up,  
           just as her heart is broken with her pain.  
 The cruel creature only are shouting still out there,  
           where our Saviour's blood was shed for us.  
 She's still upright, but not as Rachel, weeping with despair,  
           no, courageous, as the new Maccabean!  
           She's God's eternal thought,  
           the pale and noble beauty of a lily,  
 the only one who suits this Man tortured to death,  
           a candle lit by the eternal Father -  
 into this wondrous death is shining still her light.

*(Croatian Marian poetry, Preporod, Zagreb 1935)*

## A Taboo Subject

Recently, it has become unattractive, sometimes even inadvisable, to deal with the Holy Virgin Mary. There is almost no recent research or discussion about this woman. Therefore, we want to look at the relevant passages in the Gospels and try to contrast them with traditional beliefs and Marian dogmas. This is not about whether Mary, as a virgin, conceived and gave birth to Jesus through the Holy Spirit. That is not in question. Rather, we want to explore the question of whether Mary had a real marriage with Joseph after the birth of Jesus, and not a sham marriage, and whether she gave birth to other children. This text should encourage believers to reflect on the relevant evangelical texts without favouring certain answers and beliefs. We do not want to provoke, but to dig deeper, because, as Jesus said: ... *the truth will set you free*. (John 8:32b) So let us take an unbiased look at what God wants to tell us in the Gospels.

First example: *Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, „Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.“ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: „Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him “Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.“ When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and*

*took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.* (Matthew. 1:18-25) This text implies several facts, provided it is translated correctly. The angel speaks of Mary as Joseph's wife, and the evangelist Matthew speaks of Joseph as Mary's husband. There is no room for a sham marriage, especially not when Matthew says, *He had no relations with her until she bore a son*. The word 'until' implies that he probably got to know her afterwards, if, as already mentioned, the translation is correct. According to tradition, the Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew/Aramaic and then translated into Greek. And clumsy translations are quite possible.

Another example: *...and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.* (Luke 2:7) Luke is an evangelist who carefully examined everything before writing the Gospel. So he must have known what it meant when he wrote 'firstborn' instead of 'only begotten'. This means that Mary could well have had more than one child. An incorrect translation is unlikely here, since the Gospel of Luke was originally written in Greek. We also find a third example in the Gospel of Luke, when Mary and Joseph find Jesus lost in the temple among the teachers: *When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, „Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, „Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them.* (Luke 2:48-50)

While Mary at least wants to give the impression of Joseph's paternity and normal parental care before the temple teachers, Jesus points to his true father, the owner of the Jerusalem temple. This scene would tend to support the thesis that Joseph and Mary had no other children, since Mary includes only Jesus and Joseph in the family reality and parental care.



The fourth example is found in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus comes to his hometown and preaches in the synagogue. The villagers, among whom he grew up, cannot believe their ears, they are hostile towards him and say: *„Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.* (Mark 6:3) According to tradition, Mark wrote in his gospel what Peter told him. It is unlikely that something was confused here, because Peter knew everything about Jesus. One could, of course, assume that these are Joseph's children from his first marriage, although the scene in the temple, where Jesus angrily drives the merchants out of the temple in the presence of his disciples, speaks against this: *His disciples recalled the words of scripture, „Zeal for your house will consume me."* (John 2:17) This quote can also be found in Psalm 69. However, if we look at the context, it becomes clear whose children we are talking about: *I have become an outcast to my kindred, a stranger to my mother's children. Because zeal for your house has consumed me, I am scorned by those who scorn you.* (Psalms 69:9-10) There is talk of 'sons of my mother', so it is unlikely that they would be children from Joseph's first marriage, as it is said in some apocryphal writings. These apocrypha were rejected by the church as being unauthentic and implausible, especially since they appeared more than a hundred years after the resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, these writings, whether consciously or unconsciously, push Mary and Jesus into the circles of the Essenes and Gnostic sects and are to be rejected for that reason alone.

Fifth example: *After this, Jesus moved about within Galilee; but he did not wish to travel in Judea, because the Jews were trying to kill him. But the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. So his brothers said to him, „Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world."* For his brothers did not believe in

*him. So Jesus said to them, „My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, because my time has not yet been fulfilled." After he had said this, he stayed on in Galilee. But when his brothers had gone up to the feast, he himself also went up, not openly but (as it were) in secret.* (John 7:1-10) This mysterious incident is somewhat reminiscent of Joseph in the Old Testament and the jealousy of his brothers. Using the excuse that it is not yet his time, Jesus sends the brothers alone to Jerusalem. But he secretly follows them later, which on the one hand deprives the brothers of the opportunity to boast about him if he were to be celebrated, and on the other hand saves them from arrest if he were to be caught.

Sixth example: John was well acquainted with the circumstances, especially since he lived with Mary, his mother, after Jesus' crucifixion. *He mentions that Mary had a sister: Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.* (John 19:25) And in Matthew we read: *There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.* (Matthew 27:55-56) So if Joseph and Mary had no children together, then the children named as Jesus' brothers and sisters may have been the children of Mary's sister, of whom Matthew names two: Jacob and Joseph; these names correspond to the names of Jesus' 'brothers' mentioned by Mark in his gospel.

So, after we have rejected the theory about children from Joseph's first marriage, two possibilities remain: either Joseph and Mary lived a real marriage after the birth of Jesus and fulfilled the first commandment that God gave to man: *„Be fertile and multiply!"* (Genesi 1:28b), or the 'brothers' of Jesus mentioned were cousins on their mother's side. Be that as it may, neither of these two

variants robs Mary of her honour, holiness and greatness. She remains the woman above all women, the song of songs, the church above all churches, the Jewess above all Jewesses. We love and celebrate her because she found favour with God, because she, a virgin, conceived and gave birth to the Son of God, because she proclaimed in the Holy Spirit: „*Behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed!*“ And so: Holy Virgin Mary!

But to all the pious, to whom Mary's purity and virginity are close to their hearts, to all churches that are concerned about Mary's title and the incontestability of the dogmas in question, we say: you should not 'sift out mosquitoes but swallow camels'! Finally, heed Mary's messages and begin to live by them, both privately and in your communities and churches: prayer, fasting twice a week, forgiveness, reconciliation; helping the needy, peace with those who think, speak, work and live differently; love for all monotheistic believers: Jews, Muslims and believers of all Christian denominations!

## Another Taboo Subject

As believers, have we ever wondered whose words about faith we hear most often in liturgical readings? God's? Abraham's? Moses'? Jesus'? Peter's? John's? James'? No! Above all, we hear the words of Saul of Tarsus, called Paul or Apostle Paul. There are very few saints who have more than one day on the calendar, and St Paul is one of them. He was placed on an equal footing with Peter, to whom Jesus said, „*Feed my sheep, feed my lambs!*“ But was Paul one of the apostles? In the Gospel we read: *When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called a Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.* (Luke 6:13 -16) Paul is not among them. He is not even among the seventy-two disciples that Jesus sent out to preach the Kingdom. After the death of Judas, during the election of Matthias, Peter defines the apostles as follows: *Therefore, it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection.* (Acts 1:21-22) Paul is not even among the seven deacons appointed by the apostles. He did not know or meet Jesus during the entire time of his earthly life. So what is St Paul, if he is neither an apostle nor a disciple nor a deacon? This is what he says about himself: „*I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city. At the feet of Gamaliel I was educated strictly in our ancestral law and was zealous for God, just as all of you are today. I persecuted this Way to death, binding both men and women and delivering them to prison. Even the high priest and the whole council of elders can*

*testify on my behalf. For from them I even received letters to the brothers and set out for Damascus to bring back to Jerusalem in chains for punishment those there as well.*“ (Acts 22:3-5)

Thus Paul, educated and taught by Gamaliel, becomes a persecutor, while his teacher acts quite differently: *But a Pharisee in the Sanhedrin named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up, ordered the men to be put outside for a short time, and said to them, „Fellow Israelites, be careful what you are about to do to these men. Some time ago, Theudas appeared, claiming to be someone important, and about four hundred men joined him, but he was killed, and all those who were loyal to him were disbanded and came to nothing. After him came Judas the Galilean at the time of the census. He also drew people after him, but he too perished and all who were loyal to him were scattered. So now I tell you, have nothing to do with these men, and let them go. For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God.” They were persuaded by him.* (Acts 5:34-39) Paul, on the other hand, despite the caution and warnings of his teacher Gamaliel, violently persecutes the followers of Jesus, having them arrested, imprisoned and stoned. In his zeal, he wants to surpass his teacher and all the other Pharisees; he wants to be first among the scribes and Pharisees. But on his way to yet another planned persecution, he fell from his horse and went blind. *On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, „Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He said, „Who are you, sir?” The reply came, „I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, for they heard the voice but could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought*

*him to Damascus. For three days he was unable to see, and he neither ate nor drank.* (Acts 9:3-9) This describes a vision, an encounter between a person and a heavenly being. So far, there have been countless appearances of Jesus, Mary or other saints in Christianity. We call those who experience such apparitions seers. So Paul is the first seer in Christianity. Christian elders always subjected seers to questioning and examination in order to confirm them as authentic after many years, or to reject them as untrustworthy. Paul did not have to undergo these tests, because Jesus himself confirmed him through Ananias: *But the Lord said to him, „Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name.“* (Acts 9:15-16) From now on, we follow the seer and convert Paul in his new role: bearer of the name of Jesus among nations and Jews, before kings and other dignitaries. Two details from Jesus' revelation to Ananias are interesting. Jesus says “before Gentiles”, not “before heathens”. Likewise, Jesus says, ‘my name,’ not ‘my teaching’! The name of Jesus means salvation, and the teachings of Jesus are fully contained in the Torah (which translates as ‘teaching’) or, as we call it, in Jewish law. Jesus, as well as all other Jews, does not refer to other nations as heathens, but simply as Gentiles (not of Jewish descent). These two remarks are important for understanding the further work of St. Paul.

In his letter to the Galatians, he describes the events following his conversion as follows: *But when (God), who from my mother's womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; rather, I went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Kephas and remained with him for fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles, only James the brother of the Lord. (As to what I*

*am writing to you, behold, before God, I am not lying.) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown personally to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only kept hearing that „the one who once was persecuting us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." So they glorified God because of me. (Galatians 1:15-24) In the Acts of the Apostles, all this is diametrically opposed: Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized, and when he had eaten, he recovered his strength. He stayed some days with the disciples in Damascus, and he began at once to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. All who heard him were astounded and said, „Is not this the man who in Jerusalem ravaged those who call upon this name, and came here expressly to take them back in chains to the chief priests?" But Saul grew all the stronger and confounded [the] Jews who lived in Damascus, proving that this is the Messiah. After a long time had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. Now they were keeping watch on the gates day and night so as to kill him, but his disciples took him one night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. When he arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. (Acts 9:18-26) Without going into which account is more credible, we can see that whether addressing Jews or Gentiles, Paul repeatedly incites confusion, discord, and unrest among his audiences. During his performances, incidents occur that are not reported of any other apostle or disciple. Here are just a few examples: When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they cried out in Lycaonian, „The gods have come down to us in human form." They called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes," because he was the chief speaker. (Acts 14:11-12) However, some Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and won over the crowds. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the*

*city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered around him, he got up and entered the city. On the following day he left with Barnabas for Derbe. (Acts 14:19-20) The city was filled with confusion, and the people rushed with one accord into the theater, seizing Gaius and Aristarchus, the Macedonians, Paul's traveling companions. Paul wanted to go before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him, (Acts 19:29-30)*

*(...) and a young man named Eutychus who was sitting on the window sill was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. Once overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and when he was picked up, he was dead. Paul went down, threw himself upon him, and said as he embraced him, „Don't be alarmed; there is life in him.” (Acts 20:9-10)*

Yes, Paul loved to speak and write. He was a master of words, a virtuoso of sophistry. He knew how to charm both Jews and gentiles, but only at first glance. His appearances and even more his letters suggest that his followers regularly deviated quickly from the prescribed path and from Paul's rules. The reason for this is twofold. Gentiles had no religious roots that would be a solid foundation for accepting Jesus, and messianism was an unfamiliar concept for them. The Jews, on the other hand, who accepted his preaching of Jesus, abandoned him when they saw how much he rejected the law and polarised the people. So he has to argue, clarify and prove his theses again and again. This necessarily leads to an inflation of words, concepts, advice and commandments. At the same time, credibility suffers because the exuberant theory is not followed by practice, or, even more devastating, by the opposite practice. Let's look at some examples from his Song of Love in the letter to the Corinthians:

***Love is patient, love is kind –***

*(...) but Paul insisted that they should not take with them someone who had deserted them at Pamphylia and who had not continued with them in their work. So sharp was their disagreement that*



*they separated. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 15:38-39)*

***it is not pompous –***

*I have been foolish. You compelled me, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I am in no way inferior to these "superapostles," even though I am nothing. (2 Corinthians 12:11)*

***it does not inflate –***

*I think I am not inferior to the super-apostles at all. I may be a bungler at speaking, but not at knowledge; we have shown you in every way. (2 Corinthians 11:5-6)*

***it does not seek its own interests –***

*Do we not have the right to take along a Christian wife, as do the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Kephas? Or is it only myself and Barnabas who do not have the right not to work? (1 Corinthians 9:5-6)*

***it does not brood over injury –***

*Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. (2 Timothy 4:14)*

***it bears all things –***

*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach (to you) a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed! (Galatians 1:8)*

There are so many contradictions between Paul's theory and practice that you don't need a magnifying glass to see them. It is obvious that he does not tolerate any competition in his preaching, especially not from the 'super-apostles', as he calls Peter and his companions. His attitude towards the Jews is ambivalent. On the one hand, he boasts of his Judaism, but on the other hand, he persecutes, provokes and attacks Jews, first those who believe in

Jesus, and then those who have not believed in Jesus at his word. Paul quickly stops preaching to Jews because they can contradict him, and turns to the Gentiles, for whom Jesus is a novelty and who do not even know how to ask critical questions. So, little by little, he developed his own theology, laws, regulations and guidelines.

His views on sexuality and marriage are interesting. In his letter to the Galatians, he writes that in Christ, men and women are one and therefore equal: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28) But to the women in Colosse, he says: *Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord.* (Colossians 3:18) And to the Corinthians: *As in all the churches of the holy ones, women should keep silent in the churches, for they are not allowed to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says.* (1 Corinthians 14:33b-34) And he emphasises this once more: *But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and a husband the head of his wife, and God the head of Christ.* (1 Corinthians 11:3) Therefore, Paul's view of marriage is not surprising: *Now to the unmarried and to widows, I say: it is a good thing for them to remain as they are, as I do, but if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be on fire.* (1 Corinthians 7:8-9) He regards marriage as a kind of stopgap for those who cannot control their sex drive, and not as God's command to start a family and have children.

Paul is a great egocentric and often asks the acquired believers to follow him and behave like him: *Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us.* (Philippians 3:17) *Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.* (Philippians 4:9) I implore *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

(1 Corinthians 11:1) *you, brothers, be as I am, because I have also become as you are. You did me no wrong;* (Galatians 4:12) Paul often contradicts himself. For example, he writes to the Galatians: *It is I, Paul, who am telling you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I declare to every man who has himself circumcised that he is bound to observe the entire law.* (Galatians 5:2-3) But he himself does not keep it: *He reached (also) Derbe and Lystra where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. The brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him, and Paul wanted him to come along with him. On account of the Jews of that region, Paul had him circumcised, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.* (Acts 16:1-3) Did Paul not thereby, in his own words, deprive him of all the advantages he had through Jesus Christ? The same applies in other situations. He criticises the Corinthians because they have turned to pagan courts: *How can any one of you with a case against another dare to bring it to the unjust for judgment instead of to the holy ones? Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world? If the world is to be judged by you, are you unqualified for the lowest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? Then why not everyday matters? If, therefore, you have courts for everyday matters, do you seat as judges people of no standing in the church?* (1 Corinthians 6:1-4) Here Paul is stretching a point. Did Jesus not say that he would judge the world when he comes with his angels? (cf. Matthew 25:31-46) And Paul even wants to judge the angels! But when it comes to him, he seeks neither the judgment of the church nor the judgment of the Jewish council, but invokes the greatest pagan and idol at the same time - the Roman emperor: *Paul answered, „I am standing before the tribunal of Caesar; this is where I should be tried.“* (Acts 25:10a) Paul always wants to be the first and most important and therefore turns to the imperial court, which was not accessible to all mortals. No wonder,

because his logic is the logic of Greek athletes: *Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win.* (1 Corinthians 9:24) If we take this into account, we can understand Paul more easily. He tries his whole life to be the first to win the prize; first as a persecutor, then as a defender of Jesus. According to this logic, on the eve of his life he writes to Timothy: *I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.* (2 Timothy 4:7) One has to agree with Paul here in view of the mission that Jesus had intended for him when he said to Ananias, „*Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name.*” (Acts 9:15-16) It is undeniable that, thanks to Paul's efforts, the Gentiles and the Jews in the diaspora have become familiar with the name of Jesus on a massive scale. It is also undeniable that he suffered greatly as a result of his preaching and commitment. We can therefore forgive him for his use of sophistry and the discrepancy between theory and practice; we humans are all like that, perhaps not to this extent, but we are nevertheless similar to him.

But! Yes, this ‘but’ must be said. What is it? What can we hold against Paul? His relationship to the law! Before I explain this statement, however, I would first like to clarify what is meant by the term ‘law’. When Jesus, the apostles, the disciples and Paul speak of the law, they do not say ‘the law’, but ‘the Torah’. ‘Torah’ means instruction, teaching, and does not sound as frightening as ‘law’ which is actually not quite a correct translation. However, for the sake of simplicity, we will use the word ‘law’ in the following text anyway. The law comprises the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. There is no question of the law being just a set of commandments and regulations, as Paul claims. The law is a kind of instruction about God and man from the creation of the world until the Israelites entered the promised land. The law is the

history of the world, the history of God's relationship with man, the history of the election of Israel. Paul sometimes relativises, distorts and completely rejects this law, suggesting to his listeners that this is in line with God's or Jesus' intentions. And although he is opposed to it, he makes use of the law and the descriptions it contains as he sees fit. Either Paul does not understand or he considers it as collateral damage that he presents Jesus without beginning, without roots. This sounds to the Gentiles as if Jesus were an additional god in the heavens of Roman, Greek and Canaanite gods and demigods who appeared on earth to help people. It is therefore no wonder that his listeners also considered him and Barnabas to be gods and wanted to offer them sacrifices. (cf. Acts 14:11-14 and 28:5-6)

Paul writes that Jesus has abolished the law. (cf. Ephesians 2:15) But Jesus Himself says that He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it, and that not one jot or tittle of the law can be abolished until the end of the world. According to Paul's letter to the Galatians, the law was given to people to imprison them under sin, under the curse, and Jesus himself became a curse to free us from the curse. Do we have two gods? One is cold, distant, hostile, and keeps us imprisoned in sin, the curse; the other is good, he frees us from this curse and replaces the observance of the commandments with faith in him. The magic wand of Greek mythology? The beginning of Gnosticism? Yes, indeed, not long afterwards, the Gnostic Marcion in Rome called for the removal of the Old Testament from the Holy Scripture. Paul wages war against circumcision all the time, referring to Abraham and the first promise he received from God as an uncircumcised man, as Abram: *He took him outside and said: „Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, „shall your descendants be." Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.* (Genesis 15:5-6) Over the centuries, this last sentence has become an excuse for many people in Christianity that one can live only by faith, without

having to fulfil any duties. That is heresy. Paul does not mention the fact that Abraham only received instructions and commandments from God after his faith had been counted as righteousness, which he had to follow and put into practice. One of these commandments is circumcision: *God also said to Abraham: „On your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me. Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised, including houseborn slaves and those acquired with money from any foreigner who is not of your blood. Yes, both the houseborn slaves and those acquired with money must be circumcised. Thus my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting pact. If a male is uncircumcised, that is, if the flesh of his foreskin has not been cut away, such a one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”* (Genesis 17:9-14) There can be no clearer definition of God's command of circumcision than this! Who is Paul fighting against with his vehement opposition to circumcision? Against God? Against the Jews? Does his logic imply that all uncircumcised Christians are descendants of Paul? Because they certainly do not belong to Abraham! Are Christian churches also Paul's churches? Because Paul liked to ‘adopt’: *I am writing you this not to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me.* (1 Corinthians 4:14-16)

So, Paul's children, Paul's Christians! However, Jewish Christians, members of the first Jerusalem church, believed that the parable of the weeds in the Gospel of Matthew was aimed at Paul: He proposed another parable to them. "The kingdom of heaven may

be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slaves of the householder came to him and said, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' His slaves said to him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, „First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matthew 13:24-30)

Jewish Christians saw much of Paul's teaching as chaff. Peter mitigates this in his letter: *Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace. And consider the patience of our Lord as salvation, as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, also wrote to you, speaking of these things as he does in all his letters. In them there are some things hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures.* (2 Peter 3:14-16)

In his letter, James, without mentioning Paul by name, condemns his thesis that man needs no works for salvation, but only faith: *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, „Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, „You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works. You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble.* (James 2:14-19)

All of this shows that Paul's teachings contain many problematic elements. It is significant that not only are his teachings at odds with his own theory and practice, but that his teachings often contradict themselves depending on whom he is writing to, when he is writing and what he is trying to achieve. He does not even shy away from forgery: *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his descendant. It does not say, "And to descendants," as referring to many, but as referring to one, "And to your descendant," who is Christ.* (Galatians 3:16) Paul has no qualms about falsifying the text, even though it is completely transparent and easy to verify. The text Paul refers to can be found in the Book of Genesis and reads as follows: *Again the LORD'S messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said: „I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing - all this because you obeyed my command."* (Genesis 22:15-18) The quoted text clearly speaks of descendants (plural), and not of one descendant. And now let us return to Paul's 'wisdom' that faith saves, not works. Here God speaks of obedience, of action. Abraham takes his son to the hill, ties him up and wants to sacrifice him according to God's command. Before that, he circumcises himself and Ishmael, then all the men of his household and also Isaac – all according to God's command, and according to God's command he sends Ishmael and his mother away. According to Paul, does obedience not count as a work? Did Jesus preach only faith? Or also deeds: feeding the hungry, helping the sick, visiting the imprisoned, selling one's riches and giving to the poor... all commandments from the law, which Paul considers abolished.



What and how much does Paul write about Jesus in his letters? Almost nothing, except for a few sentences about the Last Supper, the suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, the death on the cross, the resurrection and ascension, almost nothing, except he was born of a woman. He does not know Jesus, he does not consult the apostles, the life of Jesus is a mystery to him. All this is not tragic, because Jesus said to the only impartial witness of Paul's vision and conversion: „*Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name.*” (Acts 9:15-16) Paul fulfilled this task, and that is why we rightly call him Saint Paul. And as for his letters, messages and theology, it would be advisable, albeit belatedly, for the Christian churches (at least the Catholic Church) to set up a religious commission – as they do for other unusual phenomena and experiences of seers – which, after thorough examination, should pass judgement on what must be believed in Paul, what may be believed and what can or should be ignored. Perhaps Jesus Christ would then finally be recognised in the Christian churches in his concrete dimension as a circumcised Jew who obeyed the law.

## Who was/is Jesus ?

Although we may think we know a lot, or even everything, about this topic, let us try here to gain a small insight into Jesus on the basis of the biblical sources. If he had had an identity card back then, it would have looked something like this:

Name: Yeshua (Saviour)  
 Surname: Hamashiah (Anointed)  
 Place of birth: Bethlehem, Judaea  
 Date of birth: Chanukka 3757 (?)  
 Nationality: Israelite of the tribe of Judah  
 Religion: Jewish  
 Mother tongue: Hebrew, Aramaic  
 Parents: Miriam and Joseph  
 Place of residence: Nazareth, Galilee  
 Profession: Carpenter  
 Occupation: Itinerant preacher

His relatives and acquaintances knew him as Yeshua; after they got to know him better, his apostles called him Yeshua Hamashiah – the Anointed Saviour. Over the centuries, Christians translated his name into Greek, Latin and other languages, and so a new ‘Jesus Christ’ was created, unrecognisable in the sense of the original.

The turning point in the life of Jesus is undoubtedly his immersion in the waters of the Jordan (Jarden) by John (Johanan). There he was revealed and testified to the world as the Son of God. Matthew describes it this way: *After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened (for him),*

*and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove (and) coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, „This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* (Matthew 3:16-17) So Jesus was completely immersed in the water by John. Such an immersion (without air to breathe) does not lack a certain panic, which was intended to give the convert a little taste of the death of the old man and the birth of the new man. Why does Jesus, as it were, force the execution of this ritual upon himself?

The key to understanding is found on the first page of the Bible: *... and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God said, „Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night.”* (Genesis 1:2b-5a) We have darkness, water and the Spirit of God here. And God says for the first time: *Let there be light!* We all know that this cannot be any kind of light that exists in this world: neither solar, nor gas, nor electric light; since God created the sun, moon and stars only on the fourth day. This means that the first word of God refers to the spiritual light that dispels spiritual darkness. And Jesus says, *„I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (John 8:12b) The first word of God was light; and this first word of God was embodied thousands of years later in Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary. But spiritually, he was there from the beginning, so he is right to say: *„Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM.”* (John 8:58)

John describes it in the prologue of his gospel: *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.* (John 1:9-10)

Let us now return to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. The situation is similar to that at the beginning of the creation of the world. John submerges Jesus under water; the water is fast and

turbulent, Jesus does not know whether John will let him come up before he runs out of breath. Confusion in his mind, panic. And finally Jesus comes up, and over the water and over him the Spirit of God, and God says, *This is my beloved Son*. Here the first circle of the story closes. God has allowed his first word to take on a fleshly body through the Jewish woman Miriam, and now he testifies to Jesus as his son.

From now on, it is Jesus who takes the initiative by devoting himself to the mission with which the Father has entrusted him. What is his first step? He goes into the desert! Why? It is written in Leviticus: *When he has completed the atonement rite for the sanctuary, the meeting tent and the altar, Aaron shall bring forward the live goat. Laying both hands on its head, he shall confess over it all the sinful faults and transgressions of the Israelites, and so put them on the goat's head. He shall then have it led into the desert by an attendant. Since the goat is to carry off their iniquities to an isolated region, it must be sent away into the desert... The man who has led away the goat for Azazel shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water; only then may he enter the camp.* (Leviticus 16:20-22,26) This was done in Israel every year on the occasion of the greatest holiday – the Day of Atonement. We know that Israelites flocked to the place where John baptised and where Jesus was baptised, and that they loudly confessed their sins before being immersed; from this environment, Jesus goes into the wilderness after his baptism, bearing the guilt, sins and transgressions of the Israelites. He willingly becomes a scapegoat, carrying their sins into the wilderness. And of course he meets the devil there. Luke describes it this way: *Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.* (Luke 4:1-2) The devil, of course, senses that this ‘goat’ will not remain in the wilderness, that he poses a danger to him and his demons, and therefore he

tries to engage him in a discussion, in order to tempt him to be careless and thereby thwart his mission, which, as we know, does not succeed.

So Jesus regards the liberation of the Israelites from their sins and thus their reconciliation with God as the priority of his mission. During his ministry, he repeatedly shows his attachment to his people, a kind of Jewish patriotism that many today would call nationalism. He does so as a human being and as God's messenger. When his disciples ask him to help the Canaanite woman, he says: „*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” (Matthew 15:24) And to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, he says, *You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews.* (John 4:22)

It is important to know that in Jesus' time, Jews called all gentiles “goyim,” which means nations, not pagans. However, they had special names for the occupiers and their helpers, calling the Romans “swine” and the Syrophoenicians and Canaanites “dogs.” Knowing this helps us understand some of Jesus' actions. Let us now look at how Mark describes the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman: *The woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, „Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” She replied and said to him, „Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps.” Then he said to her, „For saying this, you may go. The demon has gone out of your daughter.” When the woman went home, she found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.* (Mark 7:26-30)

Let us now remember the man possessed by demons in Gerasa, from whom Jesus drove out an unclean spirit: *He asked him, „What is your name?” He replied, “Legion is my name. There are many of us.” And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory. Now a large herd of swine was feeding*

*there on the hillside. And they pleaded with him, „Send us into the swine. Let us enter them." And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned.*

(Mark 5:9-13) This description by Mark is full of symbolism and hidden irony, which Jesus and the Jews held towards the Romans, their legions, towards unclean souls, but also towards the pigs and pork, which were unclean for the Jews.

Luke tells us the parable of Jesus about the lost son. Here, too, we see the dislike of the Jews for pigs and their owners. This prodigal son falls the lowest when he has to take care of the pigs: *So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."'* (Luke 15:15-19) Here again, Jesus shows repulsion for the inhabitants of that country and for the pigs, and obvious sympathy for his Jewish faith and the merciful father of the prodigal son, as well as for the conversion of the latter.

And finally, there is also his dramatic warning to the disciples and the Jews present in the Sermon on the Mount: *„Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces."* (Matthew 7:6) If his disciples and their followers had listened to him, Christians today would also have circumcision, they would also sanctify Saturday in addition to Sunday, there would be no terrible images of the Heavenly Father in their places of worship, and millions and millions of Jews would not have been bitten by dogs, torn apart by pigs and gassed and burned by Christians. But

unfortunately, after his ascension to heaven, the tendency to win over the masses to Christianity and to bathe in the crowd with relish became ever stronger; not the quality of the followers was decisive, but the quantity. They did not listen to Jesus' advice: „*Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves.*“ (Matthew 10:16) Today, we have what we have; the situation in the world and among religions is as it is.

During his public ministry, Jesus tried to make it clear to his disciples and to devout Jews that he had not come to abolish or change the Mosaic law, but to fulfil it. However, Jesus also knew that many of the stipulations by which the Israelites were bound as a community under the law could not be fulfilled during the Roman occupation, and so he emphasised personal piety and righteous living. The entire Sermon on the Mount is full of such advice, which can be summarised in one postulate: prayer, fasting, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace and generous help for those in need. In this way, Jesus built a bridge from the universal holiness of Israel – ‘*Be holy, for I am holy!*’ – to the individual holiness of each person in those difficult times for Israel. Of course, the most pious could not understand this, including many scribes and Pharisees. That is why he had numerous discussions with them.

Now a rhetorical question: Whom will a father or mother teach, warn, reprimand and punish for inappropriate behaviour – their family members or the village, the street, the town? Of course their family, their children. So did Jesus! He does not weep over Rome or Athens, but over Jerusalem. He does not reason with the Greeks or the Syrophoenicians, but with the scribes. He does not rebuke the Roman soldiers, but the Pharisees. He does not warn Alexandria or Damascus, but Korozain, Bethsaida and Kapernaum. Jesus loves his own, cares for them and tries with all his might to lead them on the right path. But before his suffering, Jesus also indicates something new. In the conversation about the

end times and the end of the world, he says to his disciples: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come.* (Matthew 24:14)

Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) means: joyful news, good news. This good news of his kingdom over Israel (the house of Jacob) was to be proclaimed throughout the world. That is why he became man and at his birth the angel proclaimed: „*He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*“ (Luke 1:32-33) After the resurrection, Jesus reiterates the need to proclaim the gospel and commissions the disciples: „*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.*“ (Mark 16:15)

Where does this expansion of the mission, this new task come from? We find the reason for it in the prophet Isaiah, a shining example of how Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets. In the second song about the servant of Yahweh, it says, among other things: *Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength, Yet my reward is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God. For now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb, That Jacob may be brought back to him and Israel gathered to him; And I am made glorious in the sight of the LORD, and my God is now my strength! It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.* (Isaiah 49:4-6) The King of Israel is to become a light for the nations according to the will of the Father. And again we are at the creation of the world: Let there be light! We should therefore expect Jesus to become a light for all nations before the end of the world.



Let us now turn to Jesus' Passover meal: *When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it (again) until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you (that) from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."*

*Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you."* (Luke 22:14-20) Jesus is speaking here to his apostles, who were all Jews, because only Jews could understand what he was getting at. According to the law of God, Jews were obliged to offer animal sacrifices. Invariably, the flesh and blood were always offered separately; never flesh with blood, that would have been sacrilege. The flesh was used as food by the officiating priests and those sacrificing, but the blood was poured onto the horns of the altar, sprinkled on people or applied to the priests. The flesh nourished, while the blood atoned and sanctified. That is why Jesus gives his body as spiritual nourishment in the form of bread, and his blood for atonement and sanctification in the form of wine, which gladdens the human heart. He also emphasises that the Jews are no longer obliged to offer animal sacrifices in this new covenant because his sacrifice is valid for all time.

For the sake of completeness, let us look at some details of the covenants that God has made with man.

With Noah: *Only flesh with its lifeblood still in it you shall not eat.* (Genesis 9:4)

With Abraham: *Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me. Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised, including houseborn slaves and*

*those acquired with money from any foreigner who is not of your blood. Yes, both the houseborn slaves and those acquired with money must be circumcised. Thus my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting pact. If a male is uncircumcised, that is, if the flesh of his foreskin has not been cut away, such a one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."* (Genesis 17:11-14)

With Moses and the Israelites (God's second commandment): *You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.* (Exodus 20:4-6)

Many Christians, especially Catholics, believe that Jesus made a new covenant with them. Well, that's not the case. Christians today do not keep a single covenant that God has made with man. Neither with Noah (blood sausage!), nor with Abraham (circumcision), nor with Moses (the second commandment of God). And yet they like to call themselves the royal priesthood, the chosen people, etc. The humility of that Syrophoenician woman who said, *Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps*, would suit them better; or the humility of the Roman centurion: *Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed*. But where is the humility of those who claim the one who said he was *meek and humble of heart*?

The image of the Roman Empire is best represented by Pilate when he condemns Jesus to death. He has all the power to release or condemn him. Although he is sure that Jesus is innocent, he condemns him to death by crucifixion. What is hypocritical about this are his words: *I am innocent of this man's blood. Look to it*

*yourselves*. But even today, this is a common practice in the Western world. The Jews who cry out, *His blood be upon us and upon our children*, are at least sincere. And although they invoked the blood of Christ on themselves and their children with evil intent, they were the first to receive the blessings of his covenant and his redeeming blood after his Passover meal, for his blood can do no harm to anyone. On the contrary, it redeems and sanctifies! That is why Christians also honour and invoke the blood of Christ. Let us now return to the question: Who was/is Jesus? So far, we have seen that Jesus is the first spoken word of God made flesh – the light of the world; that he is the scapegoat who carries the sins of the Israelites into the wilderness; that he is the lamb whose blood saves the Israelites from punishment; that he is the teacher of the apostles and the Israelites; that he is the Messiah, that is, the anointed of God. He said that he was the good shepherd, the door to the sheep, the son of David, but most often he called himself the son of man. What does that mean? He took his body from only one human being – from a woman named Miriam (Mary). In Israel, it is the law that a child acquires religion and nationality exclusively through his mother. No matter how you look at it, this Jesus, this Son of Man, can be nothing other than an Israelite, a Jew. But he is also the Son of God. However, since Christian theologians declared him to be the true God and his mother Mary to be the mother of God, it follows that God is a Jew! But how does God see this? In the Book of Exodus, it is written: *So you shall say to Pharaoh: Thus says the LORD: Israel is my son, my first-born. Hence I tell you: Let my son go, that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, I warn you, I will kill your son, your first-born.* (Exodus 4:22-23) And Mark informs us about the voice of God at the baptism of Jesus: *And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* (Mark 1:11) In Deuteronomy it is written about the chosen people: *For you are a people sacred to the LORD, your God; he has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth to be a*

*people peculiarly his own.* (Deuteronomy 7:6) At the transfiguration of Jesus: *Then from the cloud came a voice that said, „This is my chosen Son; listen to him.”* (Luke 9:35) In the second song of the servant of Yahweh, a dialogue between God and Jesus: *You are my servant, he said to me, Israel, through whom I show my glory. Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength, Yet my reward is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God.* (Isaiah 49,3-4)

In these few quotations from the Gospel, the law and the Prophets, God clearly establishes a sign of equality between the individual and the collective and vice versa: Jesus = Israel, Israel = Jesus! Every Christian should reflect deeply on this fact. If God is making a sign of equality between Israel and Jesus, why then have the Jewish people been hated, harassed and killed by Christians - who claim to love Jesus! - for almost two thousand years? Why has Israel been hanging on a cross for two thousand years thanks to Christianity, just as Jesus was thanks to Pilate? Why is the land promised and given by God not left to him? Why is he not allowed to enter the holy place of the former temple of God? Why can't he cover his head with the kippa according to religious custom without exposing himself to the danger of being spat on, insulted, beaten or killed? Is this in the spirit of Jesus? Is this in the spirit of the twelve tribes of Israel, whose names will be on the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, through which Christians should also enter? Will we be punished for our behaviour towards Israel? Or are we already being punished? At least we in the West? Isn't the Bible full of God's threats against nations that sin against his people Israel? Aren't we, our governments, parliaments, courts and media, experiencing one madness after another? Thanks to official decisions, aren't we already eating worms, locusts and who knows what else in flour, pasta and elsewhere? Haven't we invented dozens of genders and allowed people to change them at will in some countries? Do we not dare to call two men husband and call it marriage? Don't we kill millions and millions of

children in the womb every year under the pretext of human rights? Don't we use the remains of these dismembered and sucked children in the cosmetics, medical and food industries? Do we not claim to save the climate, the planet, indeed the entire universe, by skipping school, gluing ourselves to the streets and using the most toxic elements for electric cars? Do we not punish people, governments and states that advocate peace, negotiation and reconciliation? Are we not shutting down nuclear reactors to avoid producing nuclear power, while at the same time stockpiling nuclear bombs, missiles and submarines? Are people not walking through our cities behind dogs and collecting their faeces? Are we not being vaccinated with vaccines that were developed in a few months instead of several years?

By abandoning God, God's people and the following of Jesus, we became dependent on earthly 'gods' called philanthropists, on their whims, agreements and decisions. We no longer have a right to common sense, to freedom of expression, to our traditions, to the free choice of our lifestyle. We are prisoners and we have chosen our jailers. Thus God abandons those who mistreat his people to themselves. We Christians tend to be divided in our opinion of Jesus and the Jews. We love him, we hate them; we celebrate him, we curse them. Let us conclude with a quote from the Epistle of James: ... *but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. This need not be so, my brothers. Does a spring gush forth from the same opening both pure and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, produce olives, or a grapevine figs? Neither can salt water yield fresh.* (James 3:8-12)

Is it possible to love Jesus and hate the Jews at the same time?

## Jesus' Gifts to the Jews

Let us now consider the immense love of Jesus for his people.

Jesus instructs his disciples and tells them: „*There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.'* Abraham replied, *'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.'* He said, *'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.'* But Abraham replied, *'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'* He said, *'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'* Then Abraham said, *'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'*” (Luke 16:19-31)

Let us first consider the material conditions under which the first Christians lived. *All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions*

*and divide them among all according to each one's need.* (Acts 2:44-45) In the first Christian community in Antioch, on the other hand, in the time of the Apostle Paul, the circumstances were already different: *So the disciples determined that, according to ability, each should send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. This they did, sending it to the presbyters in care of Barnabas and Saul.* (Acts 11:29-30) Here, then, we find personal property from which alms are deducted, the amount depending on the personal discretion of the giver, whereas in the first Jerusalem community property was sold and distributed, in accordance with Jesus' words: *„If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor; and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* (Matthew 19:21) *Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.* (Luke 12:33-34)

We do not want to split hairs, especially since Jesus addresses these words to the Jews; but we can still consider on which side we see the leaders and dignitaries of all Christian churches today, especially the Catholic Church: on the side of Lazarus or on the side of the rich man? The text about Lazarus quoted above is not primarily about poverty and fruitless riches; if Jesus had only wanted to refer to this, the story would have ended with the words that there is ‘no transition’ there. But Jesus also reveals to us the soul of this rich man, who ended up in hell, and it doesn't look too bad. He loves his brothers, because after all, he doesn't want them to end up in hell either. He believes that God might allow Abraham to send the resurrected Lazarus to his brothers. He hopes that this would save his brothers. So Jesus does not deny that this rich man has faith, hope and love. So why does he give him a place in hell? What is wrong with this rich man? Jesus wants to emphasise that it is not faith alone that saves from hell, but deeds! If the rich man had taken care of Lazarus on earth, both would

have ended up in Abraham's bosom. Jesus wants to emphasise that faith, hope and love without works are just empty platitudes. However, if this had been Jesus' ultimate goal, he would have ended the story where he says, *'so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.'*

But Jesus goes even further, and the few sentences that follow are the most important part of the story, because in them Jesus warns, instructs and bestows gifts on the Israelites! He lets Abraham say: *'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them... If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'* With this, Jesus is unequivocally warning his disciples that false teachers, prophets, theologians and philosophers will come who will declare that Moses and the prophets are outdated and claim that Jesus has freed them from obedience to the law, that it is the faith of the uncircumcised Abram that saves the believers. Jesus emphasises to the Jews that even the dead raised from the dead would make no difference if they do not believe Moses and the prophets. The vast majority of Jews to this day adhere to this instruction of Jesus, despite unspeakable suffering, persecution and pogroms. Although they do not (yet) acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah, they follow his instructions closely and listen to his words: *„Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.* (Matthew 7:21) To this day, Jews who have converted to Catholicism or Orthodoxy, for example, cannot openly show their Jewishness by keeping the Sabbath, attending services with their heads covered, or celebrating Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. Perhaps they do it secretly, among themselves, so as not to be a nuisance to 'real' Christians. Yet they would only be obeying the will of God as transmitted through Moses and the prophets, as Jesus himself did. We can safely say that the belief in Moses and the Prophets, which Jesus preached, prevents the majority of Jews from embracing



Christianity; apart of course from the two-thousand-year-old "love" of the Christian Church, which harassed, persecuted, and murdered the Jews at every turn.

And now we turn to another of Jesus' gifts.

*„Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30)

We have to admit that this saying of Jesus flatters every Christian soul. It is often found on cards with Bible quotations. So when someone draws such a card, quiet contentment blossoms in their heart. But do we Christians even understand what Jesus meant by this and what a great gift he gave to the Jews with it? To understand how Jesus will give rest to the weary and the burdened, we have to go back to the beginning of the law. *Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.* (Genesis 2:2-3) *Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God.* (Exodus 20:8-10a)

Jesus once said that He is Lord of the Sabbath, and here He literally identifies Himself with the Sabbath: completion of God's work, rest, blessing and consecration. In this way, Jesus tells them that He is the incarnate Word of God, that He is this Sabbath, that He hallows it, that He gives us rest and completes God's work on the Sabbath by healing and casting out evil spirits. Those who come to Him will find rest, Jesus will heal, bless and sanctify them. His words were well understood by the masses of ordinary Jews, and they flocked to him, while the scribes and Pharisees, who reserved the sole right to interpret the Bible, took offence at Jesus' words. But Jesus, knowing their arrogance, false wisdom and presumptuous authority, exclaimed: *„I give praise to you,*

*Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.* (Matthew 11:25-26) These words have remained relevant in all religions to this day. So now we know how Jesus gives the Jews rest. He invites them to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest, a day when they receive blessings in the form of enlightenment and/or healing, whether spiritual or physical.

But what does Jesus mean by 'my yoke'? Jews are not oxen that need a yoke. Or are they? Yes, they are! Of course, in a figurative sense. The Jews themselves are well aware of this and also believe that they need a yoke. And God thinks so too. Already at Sinai, when the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, God said to Moses: *I see how stiff-necked this people is.* (Exodus 32:9) And after the Israelites continued their journey to the Promised Land, God says: *„But I myself will not go up in your company, because you are a stiff-necked people; otherwise I might exterminate you on the way.”* (Exodus 33:3) A stubborn neck requires taming, restriction, yoke. And God has already prepared a yoke for his chosen but stubborn people: it is the Torah or, as Christians like to call it, the law. Both God and the Jews regarded the law as a yoke that made the Israelites into something incomparable, a chosen people. And now Jesus comes and says that he is this yoke, the law, the Torah made flesh. Why and how? Jews know that the law contains 613 provisions: 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. They also explain why this is so. According to them, the 248 commandments correspond to the 248 parts that make up the human body. The 248 commandments are the active part of God's instructions because they command us to do something. The 365 prohibitions correspond to 365 days in the year and are the passive part of the regulations because they command us not to do something. Jesus calls himself the embodiment of these regulations because he was incarnated in time (365 days) and in human form (248 body parts). Even today, Christian clergy can be

found looking down on the Jews with glee and a bit of mockery because of these many commandments and prohibitions.

So how can Jesus tell the Jews that his yoke is sweet and his burden light? Let us recall Jesus' words when he drove the merchants out of the temple: *Then he taught them saying, „Is it not written: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'?"* (Mark 11:17a) With this he indicated the end of the temple in which animal sacrifices were offered, their blood and flesh, and announced a new one where people from all over the world will make a pilgrimage and pray there. But how can he abolish whole chapters of the law concerning animal sacrifice when he says that he did not come to abolish the law? *„Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."* (Matthew 5:17) He abolishes the chapters concerning animal sacrifice by fulfilling the law, and this is how it is done: The first sacrifice, which had to be made as a pledge of loyalty and obedience by the people of Israel, was Isaac, whom Abraham had to offer in the place where Jerusalem was later built. But at the last moment, God had mercy and stopped Abraham, who wanted to sacrifice his son Isaac out of obedience to God. After the exodus from Egypt, God commands the Israelites to offer animal sacrifices: individually, en masse and of all kinds, from doves to goats and sheep to oxen, but also bread, wine, oil, etc. In Jesus, God closes this circle of sacrifices by replacing them with Jesus' voluntary, unique, one-time and eternal sacrifice. But Jesus not only replaces all temple sacrifices, but also saves Isaac through his sacrifice, so that Abraham did not have to sacrifice him. That is why he rightly says to the Israelites: *Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad.* (John 8:56)

But Jesus goes even further. He leaves the Israelites the memory of this replacement for all their sacrifices: his body as bread, his blood as the wine of the New Covenant, and he asks them to remember it. Jews do this to this day; not as Christians do in the

Eucharist, but on the eve of every Saturday. Whether out of tradition or in awareness of Jesus' words? We don't know. Here is a brief description of how they do it in synagogues or at home. On the table, next to the lit candles, there is a cup (or glass) of wine (or grape juice) and a plate with two braids (or other types of bread) as a reminder of the double portion of manna that their ancestors collected in the desert on Fridays to have enough for Saturday. A blessing must be said for each action. When lighting the candles: *'Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath light.'* When washing hands: *'Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us to wash our hands.'* Blessing over wine: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine,* and over bread: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.* There is obviously a certain similarity here with the Christian Eucharist, that is, the consecration. Only God knows whether the Jews, consciously or unconsciously, also receive the fruits of Jesus' suffering, that is, his body and blood, in the bread and wine. Perhaps this is the part with the sweet yoke and the light burden. After Jesus' resurrection and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, only 270 of the original 613 Torah commandments remained for the Jews, which is certainly a great gift from Jesus to his fellow countrymen.

Let us now conclude with a special promise that Jesus indirectly gave to the Israelites. Israel is still waiting for the Messiah, who will establish a kingdom in Israel and thus bring the Jews the promised liberation and satisfaction for all historical suffering. The apostles were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and rightly expected the fulfilment of all Messianic dreams. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read: *When they had gathered together they asked him, „Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He answered them, „It is not for you to know*

*the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority.*“ (Acts 1:6-7) So Jesus does not deny the fact that he will establish the kingdom of Israel, but leaves it to the Heavenly Father to decide when and how this will happen. No doubt it will happen during his return to Earth, but more on that in the chapter on waiting for the Messiah.

## **The Coming of the Messiah or: Kill the Jews!**

At the end of time, before the end of this world, the Messiah will come. This is the belief of all three monotheistic religions. Who will he be, how will he appear and what will he do? Here, beliefs differ, although there are also some very interesting similarities. They all agree on one of his tasks: he will come as the judge of the world to judge all people. We will look at this important task of the Messiah later. Let us now look at how the three monotheistic religions envision the coming of the Messiah.

The Jews believe that the Messiah will be a male descendant of David, born in the usual way, and that the world will not be aware of his coming. He will act like a king and gather all Jewish people in Israel, the land that God gave to the Israelites. He will build the Third Temple in Jerusalem and teach the whole world about the uniqueness of God based on the Torah. Many Jews believe in the coming of two messiahs. The first, the suffering Messiah, will come from the tribe of Joseph and be called the Son of Joseph. Then the victorious Messiah will come from the line of David and be called the Son of David. He will restore the kingdom in Israel and judge all of humankind.

Muslims also believe in the coming of the Messiah. According to their faith, it will be Jesus (Isa) who will now come for the second time, with the mission to defeat the false messiah (the Antichrist), destroy the cross, teach all nations about the true faith in the one and only God, and judge people according to Sharia law. Since the Muslim belief in the second coming of Jesus is (unfortunately) hardly known among Christians, I will briefly summarise it here. This belief is derived from the hadiths, the records based on the Qur'an, examples from the life of Muhammad and Arab tradition. According to this belief, Jesus will defeat the seducer, who will try to lead the whole world astray with lies and heresies. After

that, he will break the cross to show Christians that their worship of the cross is idolatry. Muslims do not believe that Jesus died on the cross. Sharia law, or the legal system of Islam, covers all aspects of human life, from prayer to criminal law. Depending on the severity of the crime, the Sharia provides for different levels of punishment, from flogging to amputation of fingers, hands and/or legs, and even the death penalty. Western Christianity distances itself from the Sharia, fearing it and considering it inhumane. However, anyone who reads the Gospels more closely will find statements by Jesus that are not far removed from such punishment. We will mention just three here: *But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is long delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.* (Matthew 24:48-51)

*Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe (in me) to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.* (Mark 9:42)

*If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into fiery Gehenna.* (Matthew 18:8-9)

In these quotations, Jesus speaks clearly about both the death penalty and physical (self-)punishment. Of course, as Christians, we know these words of Jesus, but we suppress them from our consciousness or interpret them in such a way that they lose all meaning. Does Christianity place the freedom of the individual to do what he wants without consequences above the laws of God and the words of Jesus? Do churches place the highest value on the human body, its integrity and health? In their opinion, should

the unlimited freedom of the individual to dispose of their body only be restricted when governments and alleged philanthropists claim to save humanity from disease? From the behaviour of church authorities during the Corona, one can only conclude that this question is answered in the affirmative. In such situations, Jesus' question suddenly becomes much clearer and more understandable: *But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?* (Luke 18:8b) So let us be more cautious in criticising Sharia and Islamic law. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that Muslims adhere to the following five rules when practising their religion: 1. to bear witness that there is only one God; 2. to worship and pray to God; 3. to fast; 4. to give a precisely defined portion of their income or wealth to poor Muslims; 5. to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims are convinced that fulfilling these obligations is the best preparation not only for one's own death, but also for the coming of the Messiah and the end of the world.

Christians prepare for the second coming of Jesus every year during Advent. Advent should be a time of repentance, fasting, reflection, Bible reading and longing for the Messiah Jesus. And what remains of all that? Christian churches, at least in the West, adorn themselves with purple paint and become the scene of concerts by various musicians (usually none from the church), exhibitions and other cultural events. In this time of fasting and moderation, there are masses of Christmas parties and banquets held by work groups, clubs and associations. The faithful no longer know what penance is because the clergy do not teach it; fasting has been abandoned or, at best, reduced to 'fasting' with tasty fish and good wine. At Christmas, all that remains is to round off the culinary delights with all sorts of exquisite delicacies. And all because of the certainty of both the church elders and the faithful that Jesus will not come this Christmas either. And what would happen if he did come? Would he perhaps fulfil the words he spoke during his first stay on earth: *But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is long delayed,' and*



*begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.* (Matthew 24:48-51) Let us let each person answer this question for themselves.

Now, let us observe how the Jewish believers prepare for the coming of the Messiah. They believe that the Messianic era will be a time of general repentance and conversion, an era when no nation will enslave the Jewish people anymore. As a simulation of the entry into the Messianic era, they have been undergoing a kind of 'rehearsal' of their own death, the coming of the Messiah and eternal judgment every year since biblical times. This period of the year is called 'ten terrible days'; they begin with the Jewish New Year - Rosh Hashanah - and end with the Day of Forgiveness and Reconciliation - Yom Kippur. On these days, God is believed to listen to prayers with special attention, and therefore behave in accordance with the saying of Isaiah: seek God while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. According to Jewish belief, New Year is the day when God judges every person individually. Each person will be judged according to his deeds, and the verdict will be announced ten days later, on Yom Kippur. Therefore, on the eve of the New Year, every believing Jew repents, wants to get rid of sins and debts, and reconcile with people with whom he has fallen out. On the eve of the New Year, believers who have made a vow before God but have not fulfilled it go to the synagogue and ask three 'judges' to be released from the vow. On New Year's Day, there is a custom of giving alms and visiting the graves of particularly righteous and pious people. This is followed by days of repentance and atonement, because the verdict has already been passed on everyone, but not yet announced, so that everyone who is aware of their sinfulness tries with all their might to change the verdict or at least mitigate it. That is why people pray to God and ask for forgiveness and

reconciliation from anyone they have wronged in thought, word or deed. On the third day after New Year, the fast of Gedalia begins, and the tension, fear and efforts to achieve sincere repentance become more intense day by day. Yom Kippur is a day of total and complete fasting: no eating, drinking, using cosmetics, bathing or anointing with oil, having sexual intercourse or even wearing leather shoes is allowed. On the day before Yom Kippur, one goes to the mikvah and takes a ritual bath. A cock is slaughtered for each man and a hen for each woman, which are later given to the poor. The respective animal is lifted over the person concerned, saying, 'This is your replacement, this is your substitution, this is your salvation, this cock (this hen) goes to its death and you go into a long, good life and peace.' Probably more alms are distributed to the needy on the eve of Yom Kippur than in the whole year. This day is so full of prayers, rituals and customs that it is impossible to describe them all here. Those who survive this day are happy, eat plenty after breaking their fast, in the firm belief that their sins have been forgiven and that a good and successful year lies ahead for them.

Having established how the coming of the Messiah is believed and anticipated in the three monotheistic religions, let us now consider some aspects of the situation the Messiah would find on Earth if he were to arrive suddenly now. Where would he appear first and what would he find? If he came to his Jews, he would probably encounter parades in rainbow colours, where they promote what God abhors, for He says: *You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination.* (Leviticus 18:22) He might meet activists demonstrating for the abolition of the Sabbath, the foundation of Judaism. He might learn that in several places in Israel the Sabbath as a holy day has already been at least partially abolished. He would experience that, like all Jews, he is forbidden to enter and pray on the Temple Mount, the holiest place where the name of the God of Israel 'dwelt'. He would realise that the land of his blood brothers and sisters is so

torn apart and divided that he himself could no longer move around the regions that God had assigned to his chosen people of Israel without coming to harm.

If he were to go to the holy sites of Islam, he would find that there, too, brothers kill each other for the interests of the respective religious movements, some even for the interests of foreign rulers, who are considered unbelievers by Muslims. He would discover that Muslims send or let millions of their young men go to the so-called Christian West, where many then lose their faith, their identity, their morals, indulge in alcohol and drug use, join criminal gangs and become even worse than their Western peers. Then perhaps the Messiah would also go to the West himself, to visit the Christian centres of authority and power: the Vatican, the centres of Orthodoxy and the Protestant denominations. Everywhere he would see enormous riches: gold, jewels, works of art, and all of it mostly stolen or wrongfully taken from someone, and despite so many jubilee years never returned. He would also discover the closely guarded and revered images of the one they call their Heavenly Father. Perhaps he would remind the Christians that his Father had strictly forbidden the making of any images or statues; or perhaps he would simply laugh at human folly, because in all these images and statues he would not recognise the Father, of whom he himself once said to the Samaritan woman: „*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*“ (John 4:24) And perhaps he would be asked the same question in Rome that Pontius Pilate once asked him: „*What is truth?*“ (John 18:38) He would notice that in many Christian churches two men are blessed and/or ‘married’. This would surprise him greatly, since he knows what a great reputation Saint Paul has in Christianity and what authority he represents, and yet he wrote in his letter to the Romans, that is, to Western Christians: *Therefore, God handed them over to degrading passions. Their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the males likewise gave up natural relations*

*with females and burned with lust for one another. Males did shameful things with males and thus received in their own persons the due penalty for their perversity. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God handed them over to their undiscerning mind to do what is improper. They are filled with every form of wickedness, evil, greed, and malice; full of envy, murder, rivalry, treachery, and spite. They are gossips and scandalmongers and they hate God. They are insolent, haughty, boastful, ingenious in their wickedness, and rebellious toward their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know the just decree of God that all who practice such things deserve death, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.* (Romans 1:26-32) The Messiah might have thought that Christians would listen to Paul, at least, one of the two pillars of Christianity, if they don't listen to the Torah; but they don't even listen to Paul. They would rather listen to slanderers, despisers of God, evil-doers, proud, boasters, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, unreasonable, faithless, loveless, merciless, in a word, to the modern elites, rulers and so-called philanthropists. Perhaps they have not yet realised that Satan is the greatest philanthropist, who 'loves' people so much that he tries with all his might to separate them from God and take them to hell.

So where should the Messiah, the eternal Jew, go, when the call to 'Kill the Jews!' is heard more and more frequently everywhere in the West and the East? Even on the streets of the so-called democratic, civilised West, a Jew cannot show himself as a Jew without running the risk of being spat on, beaten or killed. National Socialism is rearing its head again, and with it anti-Semitism. Many Western rulers and leaders have introduced the methods and values of National Socialism and its greatest representative, Adolf Hitler, who, according to Vienna police files, was a homosexual prostitute in Vienna from 1907 to 1912 (see the book 'Das Heil kommt von den Juden' (Salvation Comes from the Jews), page 197, by Roy H. Schoeman, published by Sankt Ulrich

Verlag, Augsburg 2007). Of course, these modern Nazis hypocritically profess their love for the Jews while secretly harming them wherever they can. They publicly condemn Dr Mengele and his inhuman experiments on women and unborn children, yet they themselves enact laws that justify much worse. Once the Nazis had their newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, where all critics and non-Nazis were denounced, publicly branded and sentenced to death by shooting; today this is done by the mainstream media of the modern Nazis. The old Nazis chose the colour brown for themselves; the parties and associations of the modern Nazis adorn themselves with the colours that make up brown. Kill the Jews! Again! Where should the Messiah go? But enough of hypothetical questions, enough criticism, enough speculation. Let us return to what we know for sure and what all three religions testify to: the Messiah will come. The Messiah will be powerful. The Messiah will judge all people.

Judgements have been accompanying people since Adam and Eve. After their sin, God condemned them to expulsion from the earthly paradise, which entailed hard work, pain and gender inequality. The second judgement befell Cain after he had killed Abel: *„If you till the soil, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a restless wanderer on the earth.”* (Genesis 4:12) The third judgment of God, the flood, occurred because of corruption and depravity and was for all of humanity, except for Noah and his family. He carried out the fourth judgment on humanity, which wanted to ascend to heaven by building the Tower of Babel: He confused their languages. For those who do not understand, a brief explanation: God is not interested in the disunity of people when it comes to doing good, but God does not allow people to unite in an effort to ascend to heaven, to make themselves gods and to create a new world order. God has often ‘confused the languages of such people’ in history. Throughout history, God has continued to execute judgment. Consider Pharaoh and the Egyptian persecutors of the people of Israel.

Consider also all the nations that God had destroyed when the measure of their wickedness was reached, and He gave their land forever to the Israelites. After the Exodus from Egypt, God turned the matter of judgment over to Moses to judge the Israelites. Thus, Moses begins to establish a legal system on earth. He made God's laws and ordinances known to the Israelites, judged their disputes and later appointed judges who were authorised to judge in minor disputes, while he himself only took on more difficult cases. Later, God raised up judges in Israel who, together with the prophets and priests, dispensed justice and ruled over Israel according to God's laws. When they failed to do so, God punished them and with them the entire nation. When the Israelites demanded a king and got one, he too sat in judgment or entrusted other judges with the task. Let us just remember Solomon's judgement on the two women who were fighting over the child. At the end of time, God will hand over the judgement to his Son, the Messiah Jesus. Nor does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to his Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. (John 5:22-23a) At this point, at the latest, it becomes clear why all religions claim that the Messiah will judge people. And it may also become clear to us why Jesus comes twice and why the Jews believe in the suffering Messiah – the son of Joseph – and the victorious Messiah – the son of David.

The first coming of Jesus and his sacrifice were an opportunity for people to convert, to do good deeds and to be saved: *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.* (John 3:17) This is the good news, this is the gospel: until the Messiah comes for the second time, all people have the chance to save themselves for eternal life by following the example of Jesus' earthly life and enduring suffering and injustice as he did. Only when he returns as the Messiah and Son of God will he judge, and his judgment will be unchallengeable. Therefore, our earthly life resembles those Jewish 'ten days of terror' when they try to atone for their sins of

the past year through fasting, forgiveness, almsgiving, repentance and prayer in order to be acquitted. Likewise, each of us must strive throughout our lives to be acquitted at the hour of death, despite our countless sins. Fortunately, Jesus spoke on many occasions about how and according to what criteria he will judge. So we will have to give an account of our words: *„I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.“* (Matthew 12:36-37) Our carelessness will also carry weight, because to the foolish virgins who stood before the closed door of the wedding hall and asked to be let in, he replied: *'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.'* (Matthew 25:12) Blasphemy will be severely punished: *„Therefore, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.“* (Matthew 12:31-32) Let us pay attention to these words of Jesus. He fully follows Jewish terminology when he speaks of the ‘world to come’, and not, as Christians do, of the ‘other world’. Jesus forgives in advance the Jews who were later against him, who did not recognise him, who cried out, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ and says that they will be forgiven. Are we Christians aware of this?

We Christians, who proclaim and preach Jesus, should examine ourselves in the light of the fruits we bear and the warnings of Jesus: *Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, „I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.“* (Matthew 7:22-23) Jesus' words about buried talents (unused abilities, missed opportunities for positive action) should also give us pause: *Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given*

*and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'* (Matthew 25:28-30) Let us also remember the words of Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus, about the cruel debtor, about those who did not help the hungry, thirsty, naked and barefoot, did not visit the sick and prisoners, who did not make peace with opponents during their lifetime, who tempted others, who exalted themselves... The list of our sins is very long! But by showing them to us, Jesus also offers us a chance to repent, to turn around and make a daily effort to expiate our sins through prayer, fasting and penance, because we know what awaits each of us at the end of our lives: death, judgment, hell, purgatory or heaven. With death, our earthly journey ends, we are judged and eternity begins.

But why then another judgement in the end time, in the Messianic era, at the resurrection of the body? In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John speaks of the second death: *But as for cowards, the unfaithful, the depraved, murderers, the unchaste, sorcerers, idol-worshipers, and deceivers of every sort, their lot is in the burning pool of fire and sulfur, which is the second death.* (Revelation 21:8) We will try to explain why there should be a further judgment, why there should be a second death. When a human being dies, the body decays, but the soul, if it is not taken directly to heaven, is either thrown into hell or sent to be purified in purgatory after the test. At the Resurrection, the deceased will receive a new body and purgatory will be abolished. People who have been in purgatory, and there are certainly a great majority of them, will then see in the body those for whom they had to go to purgatory. Likewise, those who are already in heaven will see those from purgatory. Purgatory is not a place from which a few masses, forgiveness or sacrifices can redeem us. These things can only make our stay there easier. The purpose of being in purgatory is to realise the extent of one's guilt, to repent, to ask for



forgiveness and reconciliation, and thus to prepare for living together in heaven. We know that in heaven there is no mutual intolerance, no hatred, no friction, no recriminations, because otherwise it would not be heaven, but just a repetition of life on earth. What we know from Jesus himself is that there will be 'greater and lesser ones' in paradise, that some will sit to Jesus' left and right, that there will be wine... But for paradise to work, people must be freed from disobedience, envy, friction and unforgiveness.

It is not difficult to get one's relationship with God in order in this world, especially when one has experienced His infinite goodness, love and forgiveness; it is even easy to repent and ask for forgiveness and mercy. The real problem is interpersonal relationships. This is why Jesus teaches us to pray: Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Therefore, he emphasises: Do not judge, so that you will not be judged! Do not pray like the hypocrites! Do not serve two masters! Love your enemies! Make up quickly with your opponent while you are still on your way to the judge! Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth! Don't look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye; first take the plank out of your own eye! All of this is not only his guide for the coexistence of people, but also a kind of spiritual exercise that we should practice throughout our lives so that we do not come to that place where the fire is not extinguished and the worm does not die. But at the end of time, in the Messianic days, when purgatory will be abolished and souls will receive their bodies, some 'old acquaintances' will stand face to face. The Jew will meet the one who shouted, 'Kill the Jew!' Another Jew will meet the one who introduced the poisonous gas into the chamber in which he was. The aborted child will meet his mother and father, the doctor and the assistant who killed him. The neighbour will meet the neighbour who cunningly took his land. The political prisoner will meet his informer and his judge. The vaccine victim will meet the person who provided the vaccine without the

necessary tests, as well as the person who bought it; he will meet the person who guaranteed the safety of the vaccine and the person who imposed vaccination on him as a moral duty towards his fellow human beings. The unfortunate hermaphrodite will meet the doctor who subjected him to hormone treatment, but also the minister who allowed the treatment. Seduced activists of all kinds will meet with their ideologues and 'philanthropists'. The murderer and the murdered, the torturer and the tortured, the hater and the hated will meet. Jews, Muslims and Christians, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Sunnis, Shiites and Alevites, Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants and Lutherans will come together there. And for all those who have left purgatory behind them, the question now arises: who has been freed from hatred, bloodlust, satanic ideology and manipulative domination, who has truly repented and now begs their victims for mercy and forgiveness? Who among the victims truly forgives his murderer, torturer, and oppressor, from the bottom of his heart and with love? This is the moment that the prophet Isaiah writes about: *Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them.* (Isaiah 11:6) If someone is still a wolf even after purgatory, if he still thinks that he is not guilty and is not willing to forgive, but demands punishment for his former tormentors, then he will be subject to the Messiah's judgment, where he will be judged according to heavenly standards. We do not know what will happen to the victim and the offender if the victim still does not forgive; will only the guilty party receive the punishment he deserves and a second death, or also the victim, who could not or would not forgive. These are things that are subject only to the judgment of God.

We should rather turn our attention to what awaits us when we are found worthy of the world to come and enter the heavenly Jerusalem that has *a massive, high wall, with twelve gates where twelve angels were stationed and on which names were inscribed,*

*(the names) of the twelve tribes of the Israelites. There were three gates facing east, three north, three south, and three west. The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:12-14)* The foundations and the gates – the twelve tribes and the apostles – all Jews! This should shake us up and make us think, so that the call ‘Kill the Jews!’ disappears from people's minds and mouths in good time.

## The Lamb of God

One of the most moving moments in the Catholic liturgy is when the faithful pray before Holy Communion:

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace!

It is logical that non-Christians and many uninformed believers wonder what this means and what the point of these invocations is. They are interested in how a lamb, even if it is the Lamb of God, can give peace and show mercy. In this particular case, that Lamb is Jesus. John the Baptist called him that: *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, „Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29) John certainly did not say this out of an affinity for lambs or sheep, to impress those present with a beautiful metaphor, but out of a deep awareness of the symbolism of the lamb as a sacrificial animal rooted in Jewish history and even before that. We will try to find out the true meaning of the term ‘Lamb of God’ on the basis of biblical references and records.

In the chapter on the birth of Christ, we described how Jesus, as a newborn, was wrapped and placed in a manger, just as the shepherds did with the lambs intended for sacrifice in the temple. The apostle John describes in detail that Jesus died on the preparation day when the Passover lambs were slaughtered. (John 19:28-37) The entire life of Jesus thus takes place between the lambs destined for sacrifice (in Bethlehem) and the Passover lambs destined for slaughter (in Jerusalem). The prophet Isaiah writes: *We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all. Though he*

*was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth.* (Isaiah 53:6-7) In these few lines, the story of God's salvation of man from the beginning of the world to the future Day of Judgment is told. The risen Jesus entrusts Peter with the task: *Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.* (John 21:15-18) Like Isaiah, he also makes a distinction between lambs and sheep. Lambs are destined for sacrifice, sheep for shearing - that is, for wool, for clothing and for milk. This helps us to understand Jesus better: He entrusts to Peter a flock of sheep - his people Israel, but also sacrificial lambs - the future martyrs, like Stephen and most of the apostles. In Revelation we find a series of texts about Jesus as the Lamb slain: *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.* (5:12). *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: „Now have salvation and power come, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed. For the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death.* (12:10-11)

*...and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: „Great and wonderful are your works, Lord God almighty. Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, or glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”* (15:3-4) *I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb.* (21:22-23)

John, the apostles and Jesus himself were all Jews without exception. If the end of the world and of time will be celebrated by the Feast of the Lamb, when did the time of the Lamb begin for the Jews, for the people of Israel, and what significance does it

have for Israel and the whole world? We find the answer in the Book of Exodus: *The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb. That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. It shall not be eaten raw or boiled, but roasted whole, with its head and shanks and inner organs. None of it must be kept beyond the next morning; whatever is left over in the morning shall be burned up. "This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the LORD. For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every first-born of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt-I, the LORD! But the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thus, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you.* (Exodus 12:5-13) Now it is becoming clearer to us why the Lamb of God is so important. The blood of the lambs saved the Jews from the killing of the firstborn of humans and livestock, and the meat served as food to give them strength for the journey to freedom.

Fire is mentioned twice in this text: once as a beneficial force, and the second time as a destructive force, because it is used both to roast the Passover lamb and to destroy the remains. It is interesting that Jesus also mentions two types of fire: *„I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!* (Luke 12:49-50) The fire of baptism is a painful ‘fire’, but it leads to the salvation of people. The other fire, however, has a completely different purpose, namely to fuel the torments of hell: *Better for you to*

*enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'* (Mark 9:47b-48) Something needs to be clarified here. Jesus never mentioned the word *hell* because this word does not exist in the Hebrew language and the word *Sheol* or the Greek *Hades* do not have the same meaning as hell. Jesus used the word *geh hinom*. This word was adopted as 'Gehenna' in the Greek and Latin Gospels and remained in all translations of the Gospels for a long time. It was only recently replaced by the word *hell*, which, however, does not detract from its meaning. What is it about? *Geh hinom* is a valley, actually a gorge, near Jerusalem. At the time of the Jerusalem Temple, unclean parts of sacrificial animals, waste and sometimes the bodies of executed criminals who had not been buried were burned there. The fire burned or smouldered continuously so that all moist parts and impurities would burn. This was always a long and laborious process, and of course countless worms, flies and larvae multiplied and fed there. Jesus uses exactly this place several times as a synonym for the torments of hell. So there were also two fires in Jerusalem that never went out: a devastating one in Gehenna and one on the altar on which God's sacrifices were offered. All this was regulated by the rules that Moses received from God. Here are just two brief examples: *The fire on the altar is to be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest shall put firewood on it. On this he shall lay out the holocaust and burn the fat of the peace offerings. The fire is to be kept burning continuously on the altar; it must not go out.* (Leviticus 6:5-6) This was an example of 'pure' fire, the following is an example of destructive 'unclean' fire: *The bullock, however, with its hide and flesh and offal he burned in the fire outside the camp, as the LORD had commanded him to do.* (Leviticus 8:17) These are also images of the fire that Jesus came to bring to the earth, and the hellfire that destroys all that is sinful and impure. Jesus says: *If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into*

life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire. (Matthew 18:8) *I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one.* (Luke 12:5) It is a little confusing that Jesus uses two different comparisons for the torments of hell on different occasions: on the one hand, there is the fire that never goes out and the worm that never dies, and on the other hand, there is darkness, weeping and grinding of teeth: *He said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'* (Matthew 22:12-13) *Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'* (Matthew 25:28-30)

With these aspects of hell, we have indeed moved away from the original theme of the Lamb of God, but all this is inextricably linked, because it is the Lamb of God who has the power to free from hell or to cast into hell. Let us now return once again to the sacrificial lambs. Lambs were sacrificed even before God's covenant with the Israelites at Sinai. We will list just a few of these sacrifices. Perhaps the most famous of all is the sacrifice of Abraham. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham was convinced that this was an order from God, and took his son, along with a knife and wood, to the place God had shown him. The Bible describes this dramatic scene as follows: *As the two walked on together, Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. „Father!” he said. „Yes, son,” he replied. Isaac continued, „Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust? „Son,” Abraham answered, „God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust.” Then the two continued going forward. When they*



came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Next he tied up his son Isaac, and put him on top of the wood on the altar. Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the LORD'S messenger called to him from heaven, „Abraham, Abraham!" „Yes, Lord," he answered. „Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. „Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son." As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son. (Genesis 22:7-13) Abraham's obedience is so important that God commands Moses several centuries later to follow an almost identical procedure to the one used by Abraham here when offering burnt offerings: *Every morning the priest shall put firewood on it. On this he shall lay out the holocaust and burn the fat of the peace offerings.* (Leviticus 6:5b) Before Abraham, Noah had already offered burnt offerings after the flood. The following account makes it clear how much God liked this: *When the LORD smelled the sweet odor, he said to himself: „Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the desires of man's heart are evil from the start; nor will I ever again strike down all living beings, as I have done."* (Genesis 8:21) The subject of sacrificial lambs could end here, but thanks to Jesus, we have to go back one step deeper into the prehistory. With the mention of the righteous Abel, Jesus introduces us to one of the most mysterious events in human history. We read in the book of Genesis: *Next she bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the soil. In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil, while Abel, for his part, brought one of the best firstlings of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not. Cain greatly resented this and was crestfallen. So the LORD said to Cain: „Why are you so resentful and crestfallen? If you do*

*well, you can hold up your head; but if not, sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master."* Cain said to his brother Abel, *"Let us go out in the field."* When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD asked Cain, *"Where is your brother Abel?"* He answered, *"I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"* The LORD then said: *"What have you done! Listen: your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil! Therefore you shall be banned from the soil that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a restless wanderer on the earth."* Cain said to the LORD: *"My punishment is too great to bear. Since you have now banished me from the soil, and I must avoid your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, anyone may kill me at sight."* *"Not so!"* the LORD said to him. *"If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold."* So the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest anyone should kill him at sight. (Genesis 4:2–15) We could write a whole chapter just to explore these lines in more detail, because they contain a condensed account of human history to the present day. Instead, we will try to concentrate only on the details related to lambs and sacrifices. This raises the question of why Abel was a herdsman, even though people before the flood were not allowed to eat meat. To explain this, let's go back a chapter: *To the man he said: "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life."* (Genesis 3:17) *For the man and his wife the LORD God made leather garments, with which he clothed them.* (Genesis 3:21)

As we can see, Cain takes up the profession of agriculture that God had intended for Adam and his descendants after the sin. Abel, on the other hand, is drawn to the work that God Himself did first: he becomes a shepherd to clothe people in furs, just as God did for his parents. In a sense, Abel thus becomes the first

‘disciple’ of God. It is no wonder, then, that God looks with mercy on the lamb that Abel offers Him as a sacrifice. The question remains as to why God does not even look at Cain's sacrifice. Something must have happened, because God does not say to him in vain: *if you do the right thing*; but what exactly it is about remains a mystery. An even bigger question is why Jesus refers to these verses in the Bible when he says: *Therefore, the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles; some of them they will kill and persecute' in order that this generation might be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who died between the altar and the temple building. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be charged with their blood!* (Luke 11:49-51) We know that many of the prophets who were murdered were executed by the Jews themselves and that the Jews even killed an apostle. But what do they have to do with the murder of Abel? Why does Jesus put the blame for all the shed blood of the righteous of this world on the shoulders of the Jews? The Jews are not the descendants of Cain, but – like Jesus himself – the descendants of Seth, Noah and Abraham. But there is something else interesting. God has no mercy for Abel, despite his righteousness and despite his burnt offering, which was pleasing to him, but he has mercy for Cain, and twice at that. He warns him before the murder and urges him to resist sin, and after the murder he pardons him, mitigates his punishment and gives him a sign so that no one kills him. Perhaps Cain owed his salvation to Abel's burnt offering – the lamb – and to Abel's blood, which cried out to God from the earth. Perhaps Jesus did not threaten the Jews in anger, but rather wanted to point out their task as co-redeemers, which was foretold by Isaiah (Isaiah 49:6) and described in the chapter Who was/is Jesus?. Perhaps he wanted to tell them that just as the blood of Abel once saved Abel from death, the blood of the lambs saved the Israelites in Egypt and, like his blood – the blood of the Lamb of God – will save the world, they too will

shed their blood as co-redeemers to the ends of the earth for the redemption of the world. Perhaps this is the mystery that Christians unknowingly proclaim when they recite Tertullian's phrase, *The blood of the martyrs is the seed of new Christians*. Or perhaps Jesus meant something else. We cannot fathom all of His mysteries. Let us therefore close this chapter on the Lamb of God with the words of the prayer after Holy Communion:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
 Body of Christ, save me.  
 Blood of Christ, inebriate me.  
 Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
 Passion of Christ, strengthen me.  
 O Good Jesus, hear me.  
 Within your wounds hide me.  
 Permit me not to be separated from you.  
 From the wicked foe, defend me.  
 At the hour of my death, call me  
 and bid me come to you  
 That with your saints I may praise you  
 For ever and ever. Amen.



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