

run, and think swifter than thought. . . . He will probably be able to outrace a bullet!! He is a freak of science!" Briefly, he is now The Flash.

How puerile, how unimaginative, today's comic strips seem by comparison. Take Rex Morgan, M.D., for instance. In my day to be a doctor was to be surrounded by hissing test tubes and vile green gases. It was to be either a cackling villain with a secret formula that would

reduce Gotham City to the size of a postage stamp or to be a noble genius, creator of behemoths who would bring hope to the oppressed multitudes. The best that can be expected of the loquacious Dr. Morgan is that he will lecture us on the hidden dangers of medicare. Or save a student from LSD addiction. There's no magic in him. He's commonplace. A bore.

## New Light on Judaeo-Christianity?

*The Evidence of Abd al-Jabbar — By S. M. STERN*

THE PRESS has recently resounded with reports of the discovery of Judaeo-Christian writings embedded in an Arabic book—only known in a single manuscript in Istanbul—by the 10th-century Muslim theologian, Abd al-Jabbar. The contents of the passage in question formed the subject of a lecture, which gave rise to reports about new gospels, new light on the origins of Christianity, a detailed account of the "tragic history" of a Judaeo-Christian sect, and so on. They first appeared in American and English newspapers but were then reproduced in the press of many other countries: during recent visits to Turkey and Greece I found amusing signs of the interest with which these revelations were received by local newspaper readers.

It is difficult to assess the respective shares of the lecturer and the reporter in the exaggerated importance attributed to the texts. Newspapermen, who do not claim to be experts, could easily overestimate the importance of such discoveries, and it is clear that many of the absurdities and confusions in the press accounts must be imputed to them. But an eminent scholar is also quoted as having said that "Abd al-Jabbar's texts equal the Dead Sea Scrolls in importance." Little wonder, then, that expectations of important new information about the origins of Christianity were raised even among the well-informed—not to speak of holders of eccentric ideas about the story of Jesus, who, relying on the confused reports, rushed to announce that their ideas were "vin-

dicated" by the new texts. How could "new light" on early Judaeo-Christianity fail to shed new light also on the origins of Christianity?

ALL THE IMMEDIATE DISCIPLES of Jesus were Jews who, while believing that their master was the Messiah whom God had promised to send to the Jewish people, continued during his life and after his death to observe the law given by God to Israel through Moses. Soon some pagans joined the society of those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and not only were these accepted but the faithful of Jewish extraction also came to hold the view that the coming of the Messiah meant the abolition of the ritual laws of Moses. A religious genius, Saul of Tarsus, better known by his Latin name as Paul, worked out a profound doctrine to justify the end of the rule of the law. The door was wide open for missionary work among the non-Jews, the Gentiles, who soon formed the vast majority of the Christian church. Christianity ceased to be a Jewish sect; made itself at home in the Greco-Roman world; built up its theology with the help of Greek philosophy; finally, under the Emperor Constantine, conquered the Roman Empire. Thus Christianity was launched on its spectacular course as one of the great forces of universal history.

The majority of the Jewish nation, which had given birth to Christianity, watched with dismay, first the rise of a sect which in their view perverted the doctrine about the Messiah, and then that of a new religion which threw off the yoke of the law of Moses, the basis of God's covenant with Israel. Judaism, too, used to be a missionary religion—but henceforth it proved no match for Christianity, which offered the same message of an ethical monotheism as Judaism, but unencumbered with its ritual

S. M. STERN is a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, and the author of *Fatimid Decrees* (Faber, 1964).

laws. Judaism, checked in its course, turned its back on the outside world and became again what it had been before, the national religion of the Jewish people. For the Christian Church, which saw itself as the "true Israel"—rightful heir of the Jewish nation which had rejected the Messiah—the vigorous survival of Judaism was a thorn in the side, and the scene was set both for the millennial persecution of the Jews by triumphant Christianity, and for Jewish hatred of the Christian religion, which, by admitting the divinity of Jesus, was in their eyes nothing short of idolatrous.

There is a striking contrast between the fate of the Christian Church, a powerful institution which played a part second to none in the destinies of the world, and that of the Jews clinging tenaciously to their belief in being God's chosen people and, sustained by this belief, surviving every onslaught. There was, however, a group between the two enemies, Judaism and Christianity, belonging to both and to neither, which soon disappeared leaving but faint traces: the Judaeo-Christians, *i.e.*, the group which clung to the laws of Moses and withstood the current which carried Christianity into the Gentile world. We know well that the determination of Paul and those like him to bring the gospel of the Messiah to the pagan world and to dissociate it from the Mosaic law did not go without challenge—witness Paul's own letters and the Acts of the Apostles, written by an ardent admirer of Paul, one of the main themes of which is the account of how Paul's views on the mission to the Gentiles were accepted by the leaders of the Christian community in Jerusalem. The author minimises the opposition to Paul, but does not pass it over in silence. "Now certain persons who had come down from Judaea began to teach the brotherhood that those who were not circumcised in accordance with Mosaic practice could not be saved. That brought them into fierce controversy with Paul and Barnabas" (*Acts, 15, 5-7*). The council of the apostles in Jerusalem decided in favour of Paul. Yet Christians who refused to follow the majority in giving up the observance of the Jewish law persisted for some centuries. They formed communities in Transjordan and Syria, and Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Epiphanius, and Jerome preserved some accounts of their beliefs and quoted a few passages from their books. They were execrated by the Jews and decried as heretics by the Christians and, when they disappeared, they only left a vague memory of their existence. Well may those who admire success say that they have gone where they belonged—to "the dust-heap of history." But the historian of religion meditates with interest

on these pathetic people who refused to conform and held on to what corresponded to the practice of the actual disciples of Jesus, and wishes he knew more about them—if for no other reason than for this: that if their traditions could be recovered, they would be of great help towards reconstructing the doctrines of the circle of Jesus. The writings included in the New Testament, and more especially the Gospels, are due to people for whom the preaching of the message of Jesus to the Gentiles was an accepted fact. It is easy to realise that this must have deeply coloured their picture of Jesus. The recovery of Judaeo-Christian writings which would serve as a corrective to the traditions of the main trend of the Christian Church would rightly be counted among the greatest of literary discoveries. Unfortunately, the reports of the discovery of such Judaeo-Christian texts are misguided. The facts are as follows.

ABD AL-JABBAR, Chief Kadi of the city of Rayy (the predecessor of modern Teheran) wrote in A.D. 995 a book in which he set out to prove that Muhammad was a true prophet. Among his numerous miracles he includes the statements in the Koran about Jesus which, he argues, are correct and inspired by God, whereas the contrary accounts of the Christians are wrong. Thus it is true that the Christians believe, as the Koran says, that Jesus was God, one of three, and their subtle explanations about the doctrine of the Trinity are sophistries. Muhammad was right to claim that the Christian religion as professed by its followers did not correspond to the original doctrine of Jesus, but was a perversion of it. The Koran denies that the Jews have killed Jesus: "And for their saying: We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God, though they did not kill him and did not crucify him, but he was counterfeited for them"—this, says Abd al-Jabbar, is the truth, and not the account of the crucifixion as told by the Christians.

All these propositions are defended with arguments which—as so often with this kind of argument—are a curious mixture of acumen, sophistry, and naïveté. What is important for us is to note that there are passages in Abd al-Jabbar which might ultimately go back to Christians who observed the Jewish laws and therefore considered the other Christians as renegades from the original teaching of the Messiah. Such texts may have come to the knowledge of Muslim converts from Christianity who were keen to turn texts of their former religion into weapons for their new one. On the other hand, it is not impossible—it is in fact more probable—that the arguments are

not derived from Judaeo-Christians, but simply invented by such ex-Christians converted to Islam. Since Abd al-Jabbar does not reveal the sources of his stories, there can be no certainty.

ABD AL-JABBAR collects a number of passages from the gospels which show Jesus observing the Jewish law. Every reader of the New Testament could produce something similar. It would not have been beyond Abd al-Jabbar, a shrewd man if anything, to cull such an anthology from an Arabic translation. Yet he may have used—who knows through how many intermediaries—a Judaeo-Christian collection of passages proving this (for them essential) point. We are told by some Fathers of the Church that a Judaeo-Christian scholar of the 2nd century, Symmachus, had collected some passages from the gospel of Matthew.

In a long account Abd al-Jabbar explains how the ritual laws of Judaism—circumcision, turning in prayer towards Jerusalem, the observance of the Sabbath, the prohibition on eating pork, the admissibility of divorce—were observed by the original disciples of Jesus as well as by himself, and were wickedly put aside by the Christians of the following generations (especially by the cynical opportunism of Paul). This account could have been made up by a Muslim polemicist; although one could argue that it was derived from some Judaeo-Christian circle who of course would have felt passionately about this subject. The original phrases have been kept as far as possible in the following summary.

The disciples of Christ continued to associate with the Jews in their synagogues and the only difference between them concerned the person of the Messiah. The Christians, however, complained to the Roman authorities that they were persecuted by the Jews. The Romans invited them to become like themselves, turning in their prayers to the east, instead of to Jerusalem, and eating pagan food—this was accepted by the greater part of the Christian community. But the disciples of Jesus disapproved of this and refused to hand over the gospel to the traitors. Fearing that the Romans might force them to do so, they fled and hid. The Romans wrote to their governor in Mosul and Mesopotamia [*or Arabia; none of these provinces belonged to the Roman Empire in the first century*] and some of the true disciples were seized and killed. The Romanised Christians decided to replace the original gospel on which they could not lay their hands by commissioning various men to write down what they remembered of it. Eighty gospels were composed, but many of the passages of the original gospel were left out, partly on purpose, partly owing to forgetfulness. The cross and the crucifixion were not contained in it [*the original gospel*]. Four versions were finally chosen, none of which was in Hebrew in which the

Messiah and his disciples spoke—this was done to facilitate the distortion of the Messiah's original teaching.

Paul, originally called Saul, was a cunning rogue who only sought power. First he assisted in the persecution of the Christians and then left Jerusalem. When he returned after a long absence, he went over to the Christians and advised them to dissociate themselves from the Jews and turn to the nations hostile to them. As the reason for his conversion he alleged a vision on the road to Damascus, where God [*not Jesus*] appeared to him. He said that God lifted him up to heaven for a fortnight and spoke to him against the Jews. Paul was taken by the Jews to the Roman governor, who wanted to whip him; but Paul declared that he was a Roman [*i.e., in the sense of a follower of the pagan Roman religion, which is an obvious distortion of Paul's invocation of his Roman citizenship, Acts, 22, 27*]. So he was taken to Constantinople where he incited the Romans against the Jews. He gained the ear of the Empress—who, since the Romans are not allowed to divorce their wives [*this is of course quite wrong*] was incensed against the religion of the Jewish prophets who permitted divorce by the husband. Paul declared that a man ought to take one wife only and thus won popularity with the feminist Empress and all Roman ladies. [*This, and not an ordinance of Jesus, is being alleged as the origin of the Christian prohibition of divorce.*] Since the Romans abominated circumcision, Paul abolished it. He allowed the eating of pork, saying: Not that which goes into a man's inside is forbidden, but that which comes out of him, namely, lies. [*The words of Jesus declaring all foods as clean—Mark, 7, 17 ff.—are here being attributed to Paul.*] Similarly he allowed the eating of the meat of animals slaughtered by pagans, adopted the Roman custom of turning in prayer to the east, abolished the ritual washings before prayer, and allowed Christian women to marry pagans. The law is evil, he said, and when its commandments are abolished, God's grace is completed. Thus Paul went over from the religious practices of the Messiah to those of the Romans. It was the Christians who turned Romans, rather than the Romans Christians.

The Emperor Titus, accepting Paul's denunciations of the Jews, waged war against them and took much booty, which increased Paul's reputation. But finally, when he had to admit that the Messiah, and even himself, had been circumcised, and he, claiming to be a healer, could not cure his own illness of elephantiasis, Paul's insincerity was found out and he was crucified by Nero. [*The author thinks that Nero reigned after Titus.*] The Romans then returned to paganism and remained so until the time of Constantine.

Constantine was the son of Emperor Pilatus [*in reality: of Constantius Chlorus*] and of Helena, who was originally a barmaid in Harran. [*Helena was a woman of humble origin; her native town is uncertain, but one version does have it that she came from Edessa, a Mesopotamian town near Harran.*] Helena was a Christian and, by introducing Christian monks to her husband, persuaded him of the unworldliness of the Christians.

Constantine suffered of leprosy, which according to Roman custom excluded him from the office of Emperor—this made him turn to Christianity, which knew not of this prejudice. When the Romans were attacked by a barbarian army, he let them perform the rites to the pagan gods, and when they were defeated, put instead the cross on their standards. Since by chance the enemy retreated, he gave that out as the victory of the cross. Thus he was able to abolish paganism, turn the pagan temples (especially those of Athens and Harran) into monasteries for monks who served him as spies. But apart from idolatry, he did not abolish the Roman customs admitted by Paul into Christianity. Those who remained faithful to the religion of the Messiah [*i.e.*, who retained the Jewish law] were persecuted, were forced to worship the cross, eat pork and follow the Roman customs. Those who refused were killed.

Constantine's successors introduced further novelties into Christianity. They adopted Sunday instead of the Sabbath, and fixed the day of the birth of the Messiah on the pagan festival known as the Birthday of Time. [*It is true that the feast of Epiphany on January 6th took the place of the Egyptian festival of the Birthday of Aeon, "Time".*] Whereas the Messiah and his disciples fasted on the Jewish fast-days, a new period of a fifty-day fast was now introduced. They also adopted the pagan use of incense, and put up images in the churches.

THIS EXTRAORDINARY STORY is not devoid of some interest—as a fanciful attempt to explain how the original way of life of the disciples of Jesus resulted in the Christian religion. As seen by the author, the principal culprit is Paul. We know that he was, naturally enough, an object of hatred to early Judaeo-Christian sects. In their legends he appeared as the adversary of Peter. The 4th-century author Epiphanius reports that it was told of him that he had been a Greek who became a Jewish proselyte because he wanted to marry the daughter of the Jewish high priest—but because he was not allowed to marry the girl he wrote against circumcision, the Sabbath, and the law. The spirit of this tale is not so far from the caricature of Paul presented in the account used by Abd al-Jabbar. There are also somewhat similar stories about Paul and Constantine in other Muslim authors. Since the Muslims also had an interest in showing that historical Christianity was not the religion professed by Jesus, it is not impossible that the story is the invention of an ex-Christian convert to Islam. If we preferred to attribute the story to Judaeo-Christians, it *would* be interesting evidence for the fierce hatred kept alive in their circles. But the historical errors in the account are enough to show that we have here an entirely derivative piece of work, based on

the Acts of the Apostles and some passages of the Pauline epistles, but mainly on the somewhat coarse fancy of its author.

The part of the story concerning Constantine can be proved to derive from the pagans of Harran, in which city paganism survived well into the Islamic period. They had good reason to show Constantine, the man who ushered in the decline of paganism in the Roman Empire, in as bad a light as possible. This part is thus certainly not of Judaeo-Christian origin; and instead of assuming that the Muslim author coupled a pagan and a Judaeo-Christian story, it is more plausible to conclude that he took over the pagan story of Constantine and supplemented it with a fanciful travesty of Paul's history.

THERE WERE SOME early Christian sects of gnostic character who so emphasised the divine nature of Christ that they denied the reality of the crucifixion. They found it inconceivable that the divinity should suffer death. We hear of one of these groups that—taking advantage of the stylistic ambiguity of the account in *Mark*, 15, 21 ff.—they claimed that the man crucified was not Jesus, but Simon of Cyrene. In the account used by Abd al-Jabbar, which bases itself on an unknown gospel, another kind of false identity is alleged: Judas Iscariot, who promised to single out his master by kissing him, kissed the wrong man. Note, however, that this is by no means implied by the text quoted for the purpose, but is a rather quibbling *inference* from it. The inference about the exchanged identity does not, however, depend on any feature particular to the gospel used, but could have been made from the canonical gospel stories as well. The following is a résumé.

On the Thursday before the Passover, the Jews came to Herod and complained against Jesus. He ordered his attendants to go and arrest him, but when they were asked whether they knew him, they said no. Neither did the Jews know him, but they said they would surely find someone to point him out. They met Judas Iscariot who offered to indicate Jesus by kissing him and was paid thirty silver pieces. Judas after kissing a man disappeared in the crowd. The man, when arrested, showed great perturbation. When Herod saw his fright he had pity on him and interrogated him in a friendly manner. The man denied that he claimed to be the Messiah. Herod said to the Jews that the man denied the accusation, and washed his hands of his blood. Pilate asked Herod to send him the man who showed the same signs of fear before Pilate. Pilate returned him to Herod saying that he found in him no guilt but neither could he get anything reasonable out of him. Herod put the man into prison overnight. Next day he was

mocked and whipped by the Jews and crucified in a field. His last words were: my God, why have you forsaken me, O God, why have you left me? Judas came to the Jews asking about the man arrested the day before. When he heard that he was crucified he was greatly astonished and went to the field. Seeing the man he exclaimed: This is an innocent man, this is innocent blood. Throwing the thirty pieces of silver at the faces of the Jews, he went to his house and hanged himself.

The text does not imply at all that the man crucified was other than Jesus. This is deduced from the facts that the identification was made by Judas alone, that the arrested man was greatly frightened, that he did not admit to being the Messiah, and that Judas proclaimed him to be innocent (as he does also in *Matthew*, 27, 4). It is easily seen how far-fetched the deduction is. Abd al-Jabbar is of course delighted to find the Koranic doctrine of the mistaken crucifixion vindicated. One is inclined to ascribe the whole argument to him (or to another Muslim author). The only puzzle is why an uncanonical gospel was used. (Abd al-Jabbar is in fact under the erroneous impression that the story he quotes is in the canonical gospels.) This *may* point to some obscure sect as the source of the text, and possibly of at least part of the argument deduced from it.

Another, even more strange, proof for the argument that the crucified man was not Jesus is derived from a modified version of John's gospel (19, 26-7) which is quoted in the following form:

The Messiah was standing near the place of crucifixion. Mary, mother of the Messiah, came to the place. The crucified saw her and said to her from the cross: "There is your son," and said to the Messiah: "There is your mother." Mary took him by his hand and went away.

Thus, it is not the crucified Jesus who entrusts his mother to the "beloved disciple," but the unknown substitute who points out to each other Jesus and Mary standing in the crowd. Here I feel the text itself must have been tampered with—for it seems obvious that we have an edited version of the passage from John rather than an independent text.

Abd al-Jabbar also offers some quotations from uncanonical gospels, saying for instance that one gospel began with the words: "This is the table of descent of Jesus the son of Joseph the carpenter"; and referring to an unknown episode of the crucifixion in another: "When he was crucified, there came his mother Mary with her children, Jacob, Simon, and Judah, and stood in front of him. He said to

her from the cross: Take your children and go away!"

There is also an unexpected piece of information concerning the views of some Jews about Jesus. The traditional Jewish view of Jesus was hostile. He was considered as a perverter of true religion and the usual Jewish account of his life consisted of a malicious parody of the Christian accounts. But from Abd al-Jabbar we hear that some Jews believed Jesus to have been neither divine as the Christians hold, nor a prophet, as he was believed to be by the Muslims, but a righteous and God-fearing man who obtained a following among his people which aroused envy and led to his unjust execution. They said that Jesus himself did not claim to be the Messiah, since he denied this accusation before Pilate (*Luke*, 23, 4, 9) and forbade his disciples to say that he was the Messiah (*Matthew*, 15, 13-20). From other sources we know that similar views were held by some Karaite Jews. (The Karaites did not acknowledge the authority of the Talmud, which formed the basis of Rabbinical, "Rabbanite," Judaism.) It seems, alas, that the expression of such a view about Jesus was due rather to the wish to be able to charge the Rabbanites with the persecution of that righteous man than an enlightened rationalism *à la* Renan.

THE CONCLUSIONS are clear. The texts are of interest even if most of them seem to be the product of Muslim polemics against Christianity. If some of them could be ascribed to some Judaeo-Christian circle, they would gain in importance. But it must be kept in mind that, first, it is uncertain whether any of the texts really go back to Judaeo-Christians; secondly, that even if one decides in favour of the hypothesis that they do, the sect from which they derived would still remain shadowy. The "long account of the history of a Judaeo-Christian sect" allegedly contained in Abd al-Jabbar's passage is mere fiction—it is not there. Thus, if the texts shed any light on Judaeo-Christianity, the light is dim indeed. They shed, however, no light whatsoever on the origins of Christianity. The statement of an eminent scholar about the texts in Abd al-Jabbar "equalling the Dead Sea Scrolls in importance" bears witness to a charming enthusiasm, but not to much good sense. The texts are of some value for scholars. But the public need no longer scan the daily and weekly papers for the "latest revelations" about the crucifixion and the doctrines of the early Christians all derived from Abd al-Jabbar. For there are none to be had from that source.

*C. Day Lewis*

## Philosophy Lectures

He goes about it and about,  
By elegant indirections clears a route  
To the inmost truth.  
Cutting the ground from underneath  
Rogue analogies, dialectic tares,  
See how he bares  
And shames the indulgent, weed-choked soil,  
Shaving his field to the strictly meaningful!  
Now breathless we  
Await, await the epiphany—  
A miracle crop to leap from the bald ground.

Not one green shoot, however, is discerned.

Well, watch this reaper-and-binder bumbling round  
A shuddered field. Proud sheaves collapse  
In narrowing squares. A coarser job, perhaps—  
Corn, corncockle and poppy lie  
Corded, inseparable. Now each eye  
Fastens on that last stand of corn:  
Hares, partridge?—no, surely a unicorn  
Or phoenix will be harbouring there  
Ripe for revelation. Harvest forgot, we stare  
From the field's verge as the last ears fall.

Not even a rabbit emerges. Nothing at all.

Are the two fields identical,  
Only the reapers different? Misdirected  
Or out of our minds, we expected  
A wrong thing, the impossible  
Or merely absurd—creatures of fire and fable  
Where bread was the intention,  
Harvest where harvest was not meant.  
Yet in both fields we saw a right end furthered:  
Something was gathered.