

**Zeitschrift:** Judaica : Beiträge zum Verstehen des Judentums  
**Herausgeber:** Zürcher Institut für interreligiösen Dialog  
**Band:** 28 (1972)

**Artikel:** God's poor' people  
**Autor:** Jocz, Jacob  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-961222>

#### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

#### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

#### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 17.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

eine Schönheit, die schlechterdings unvergleichlich und unbeschreibbar ist (Str. 1). Der Überschwänglichkeit dieser Behauptungen stehen die originellen Umschreibungen für das Verliebtsein in Str. 2 in nichts nach. Str. 3 fordert dazu auf, in das Lob des Lieblings miteinzustimmen, wendet sich aber dann an diesen selbst: Er möge doch wieder gut sein. Strophe 4 setzt voraus, dass diese Bitte nicht umsonst war, und bringt die überschäumende Freude darüber zum Ausdruck: Und sollte die öffentliche Meinung noch so toben, jubelnd und bedenkenlos wird die Liebesaffäre öffentlich einbekannt.

Zu einzelnen Zeilen:

Zl. 1 Die Vokalisation *Me-‘asîs* (s. Schirmann) metri causa. Vgl. zum Ausdruck Cant 8, 2.

Zl. 4 hohe Sterne, *kôkebê ‘ärâš*, Sterne der (furchtbaren) Höhe, des Himmels. Das Wort, in der Bibel nicht belegt, begegnet im Pijjut häufig als einer der Ausdrücke für «Himmel».

Zl. 13f. Simeon und Gideon: die biblischen Helden.

Zl. 15f. Wörtlich: sein Zelt ist ein Aufenthalt seiner Liebe in meinen Gedanken.

Zl. 30 Wörtlich: Ich liebe einen schmalhüftigen hebräischen Knaben.

## God's 'Poor' People

*By Jacob Jocz, Toronto*

Among Jews it is taken for granted that the Church is an offshoot of Judaism. Jewish scholars look upon Christianity as a Jewish heresy. They frequently speak of the Church as a daughter of the Synagogue. This view is often echoed by Christian writers. Except as a subject of academic interest antecedents are of small import. It is only when the question is put in its proper context that it acquires considerable significance. The intention of this essay is to sort out the connection between Church and Synagogue in relation to the Bible. For a start we will begin with the Synagogue. We ask: what is the connection between rabbinic Judaism and O. T. faith?

## 1. Rabbinic Judaism and the O. T.

Anyone who looks at the *torah* without prejudice and compares it with rabbinic Judaism cannot help but see a radical difference.

Ancient Hebrew religion was centered upon cultic worship. The whole attention was focused upon Temple and sacrifice. In this context the priest occupied a unique position. He stood as the mediating agent between the holy God of Israel and sinful men. In this capacity he acted as *shaliah zibbur* – the representative of the community, before God. Both by descent and training he served as the go-between the two parties effecting at-one-ment. Ritual holiness demanded an atoning sacrifice as condition for forgiveness. There could be no direct approach to the God of Israel. As one scholar put it: «the access of the ordinary Israelite to God is very restricted. He can only stand afar off while the priest approaches Jehovah as his mediator, and brings back a word of blessing» (W. Robertson Smith, *The O. T. & the Jewish Church*, 1902, 247). Behind the principle of non-immediacy which is the basic requirement of cultic worship is the acknowledgement of man's unworthiness in the Presence of God. Robertson Smith rightly observes that no Oriental would approach even an earthly court without a token of homage let alone the Sanctuary of the King of kings.

With the destruction of the Temple in 70 A. D. a new situation arose. The Synagogue was faced with the task of finding a substitute for the Temple. There was already precedent in Israel's experience. Even prior to the destruction of the Temple Jews in the diaspora evolved a non-cultic piety around the Synagogue. This institution must have come into being as a result of the Babylonian captivity. Jewish scholars have recently questioned the Synagogue's independence while the Temple was still in existence, and with good reason. Whatever purpose it may have served it could never be a rival to the Sanctuary at Jerusalem. This was made impossible by deposition of Mosaic law. The very term *'avodah* was a technical term and reserved to describe the Levitical cult. The Synagogue was never intended as a replacement of the Temple. This can be seen from the fact that there was a Synagogue in the Temple itself for the benefit of the serving priests. This was in a hall adjacent to the Sanctuary where

the priests could retire to recite the Shema and the prescribed benedictions at intervals between the sacrifices.

Because of the close connection between Temple and Synagogue George Foot Moore is led to the mistaken conclusion that the cessation of the sacrificial cultus created no serious crisis to the religious life of the Jews (cf. *Judaism*, 1927 II, p. 13). This view is not supported by Jewish tradition. To the contrary, the change from Temple to Synagogue was a radical change and left its mark deeply embedded in the Jewish religious consciousness. The shift of emphasis from cultic participation to study of *torah* as a surrogate for the sacrificial cult radically changed the whole temper of O. T. religion to something else.

Whereas in the Sanctuary the Jew was confronted with the awesome Presence of the Invisible and thrice-holy God, in the Synagogue he was placed *vis à vis* a written scroll. No matter how sacred the Scroll was conceived to be it could never substitute for the numinous experience of Levitical worship. Jews down the ages have felt the loss of the Temple as a major calamity. Mishnah *Ta'anit* prescribes that on the 9th of Ab, the traditional date of the Destruction of the Temple, it is forbidden to cut the hair, to wash the clothes, to eat flesh, to drink wine (4.7). According to Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel R. Joshua is credited with the saying: «Since the day that the Temple was destroyed there has been no day without its curse; and the dew has not fallen in blessing and the fruits have lost their savour» (*Sotah* 9:12).

Here is another saying attributed to the famous sage R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: «Since the day the temple was destroyed Sages began to be like school-children, and the school-children like synagogue-servants, and the synagogue-servants like the people of the land, and the people of the land waxed feeble, and there was none to seek (after them?). On whom can we lean? – (Except) on our heavenly Father» (*Sotah* 9:15).

The Synagogue liturgy makes many references to the Temple and the hope for its speedy restoration. The rabbis never ceased to regard the cessation of Temple worship as a temporary suspension. The hope for the restoration of Temple worship is built into the traditional

structure of Judaism. The 613 precepts which comprise the Mosaic law, according to rabbinic teaching, include all the positive and negative commandments relating to the Temple cult. The rabbis have never entertained the notion that Levitical law has been superceded. Moses Maimonides who lived eleven centuries after the destruction of the Temple still treats of the cultic laws as if these were of contemporary relevance. Referring to the altar in Ez. 46 he explains that the prophet had in mind the Third Temple which will be built in the days of King Messiah. The famous Rabbi-philosopher cannot contemplate a situation in which the provisions of the Law have become void: «it is fitting for man to meditate upon the laws of the holy Torah and to comprehend their full meaning to the extent of his ability. Nevertheless, a law for which he finds no reason and understands no cause should not be trivial in his eyes» (Maimonides' *Code on Temple Worship*, transl. by Mendell Lewittes). But as far as the Levitical laws are concerned Maimonides has no problem. For him all the cultic precepts are «positive» commandments and are meant to be observed, for the *torah* remains unchangeable. For this reason he formulated the credal statement: «I believe with perfect faith that the *torah* will not be changed, and that there will never be any other *torah* from the Creator, blessed be His name.» This longing for the restoration of Temple worship finds expression in the Synagogue's liturgy:

«May it be thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that the temple be speedily rebuilt in our days, and grant our portion in thy Law. And there we will serve thee with awe, as in the days of old, and in ancient years. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in days of old, and as in ancient years» (S. Singer's authorised Prayer Book, p. 119).

This was and remains the prayer of every pious Jew. Samson Raphael Hirsch writing in our own century sees in the present arrangement of the Synagogue only a «substitute» for the spiritual forces which emanated from Temple worship. He looks to the time when God will gather again His people to the Land of the fathers and when the cult will be restored (cf. *Horeb*, transl. by I. Grunfeld, II, 475ff., 575f.).

Traditional Judaism is thus not only an interim arrangement but also a different faith. It came about in response to an emergency which

necessitated a shift from cultic worship to non-cultic religion. This shift utterly changed the religious orientation of the Jewish people. Judaism became a democratic faith which encouraged a personal and immediate approach to God.

The substitution of study for cultic worship which dominates traditional Judaism has of necessity given to the *torah* a legal fixity. «Teachings» of torah have become *mizvot* – legal injunctions. A good example are the dietary laws. The prohibition to boil a kid in its mother's milk (Ex. 23:19) has evolved into an elaborate system of separation of milk and flesh to the point where the same utensil cannot be used for both. After eating meat no orthodox Jew can have milk with his coffee. Another example is in respect to the observance of the Sabbath. The prohibition of creative work extends to the use of electrical appliances like hearing-aids, etc. An orthodox Jew can not make use of the elevator on the Sabbath day.

Such stringent interpretation of *torah* has led to innumerable legal fictions whereby the letter of the law is preserved while the intention of the law is voided. Here Isaiah's indictment which is quoted in the Gospels is more than applicable to post-exilic Judaism: *mizvot 'anashim* – the commandments of men – have replaced the fear of God (Is. 29:13; cf. Mark 7:6–7). Institutionalized religion is always in danger of such hardening; this applies to Christianity as much as to Judaism.

Our purpose is not to criticize Judaism but only to point out the difference between O. T. religion and that of later Judaism. It is a fallacy to maintain that the Synagogue is the direct descendent of the O. T. It certainly has inherited many O. T. features, specially in the area of moral values. But as far as the texture of religious life is concerned there is a radical rift between Pharisaic rabbinism and Levitical priesthood.

## 2. *Gentile Christianity and the O. T.*

Our second concern is to look into the relationship between the Gentile Church and the Hebrew Bible.

One of the difficulties for Gentile Christians about the O. T. is its strong coninherence between race and religion. The God of whom

the *torah* and the prophets speak is essentially Israel's God. The history of the people and the land is here closely interwoven with the story of God's dealing with the Hebrews. The Creator of heaven and earth appears to be pre-occupied with a small people whom He takes under His special protection. He is always presented as the God of the fathers. He chooses Abraham as His friend and Jacob becomes His favourite. Not that there are no universalistic tendencies in the O. T., specially in the Prophetic books and the Psalms, but the main emphasis is upon Israel.

A second difficulty is in respect to what is said about Israel's God. YHVH is presented as a jealous God, a God of war and judgement. The implacable harshness of such a God is contrasted with the God of love in the N. T. It was this fact that drove Marcion, the notorious second-century heretic, to distinguish between the God of the O. T. and the Father of Jesus Christ. For him the O. T. God, the Demiurgos who created the physical world, was fickle, capricious, despotic and cruel. By contrast, the Supreme God whom Jesus came to reveal is the God of Love. Marcion did not question the accuracy of the O. T. but believed that with the coming of Christ a radical and new beginning was made. Those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah were freed from the power of the O. T. God.

Traditionally the O. T. was understood by the church in a predictive sense: the prophecies of the O. T. were fulfilled in the N. T. This, of course, reduced the Hebrew Bible of the function of *praeparatio evangelica* – preparation for the Gospel. Once the «new» Covenant came into existence the »old« Covenant had only archeological value. It had now served its purpose and could only be used for verification of messianic passages.

The Church approached the O. T. from two different perspectives: the moral and the ceremonial. As far as the moral aspect was concerned its binding force was measured against N. T. values; as to the ceremonial or Levitical laws these ceased with the coming of the Messiah. The warrant for this approach was found in Pauline teaching and in the Letter to the Hebrews. But the O. T. was too powerful a document to be treated lightly. First, there was the witness of the N. T. to the authority of the Hebrew Bible. Second, there was the need for historic continuity, otherwise the N. T. was left without

background. Third, there was the undeniable fact that Jesus, his disciples and the early Church were all rooted in the O. T. But apart from the historical considerations there was a powerful theological reason why the O. T. could not be neglected: the validity of the «new» revelation could only be legitimized if the same God had already revealed Himself in the past, otherwise He would appear as a *new* God. This was the reason why Marcion was so vigourously resisted. But granted the fact that «in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets» (Heb. 1:1), then what He says «in these last days» by His Son, could not be so utterly different as to make the former of no importance. Be it noted that the Apostle Paul treats the Law with utmost reverence (cf. Rom. 7:7–12) and that the writer to the Hebrews uses the Levitical cult as anti-typical illustrations of the better hope (Heb. 7:19), the better sacrifice (9:23), the better covenant (8:6).

The historical and the theological inter-connection between the Hebrew Bible and the N. T. was important enough to the Church for her to retain the O. T. as part of Holy Writ. But it must be admitted that its usefulness was limited to the messianic testimony. Thomas Aquinas, the great 13th c. theologian, raised the question: Why do we yet read the O. T.? He answers: we read it for testimony, not for observance (*legimus ad testimonium, non ad usum*). The Roman Catholic theologian, Bernhard Bartmann, defends the thesis that Jesus «knew himself as absolute beginning». Jesus did not operate historically he says, but «prophetic – vertically». On this assumption, of course, the O. T. has lost all its validity. Bartmann quotes pope Eugenius IV who pronounced *legalia veteris Testamenti... cessasse*. But Bartmann seems to go beyond the *legalia* and declares even the moral teaching of the O. T. as superseded (cf. *Glaubensgegensatz zwischen Judentum und Christentum*, 1938). Some Lutheran writers went even further and advised against the use of the O. T. as a harmful document.

This however is not the whole story. In the protestant tradition, the O. T. occupies a place of honor and importance. Philip Melanchthon, Luther's colleague and collaborator, speaks of Moses as an «evangelist». He refuses to separate the O. T. from the Gospel. He opposes the idea that the O. T. is to be reduced to allegories. Me-

lanchthon insists that both Testaments exhibit one and the same spirit. He contradicts the notion that the O. T. contains nothing else but law: «Those who call the O. T. simply that which is law, seem to me to be following a custom of speech and not of reason» (*Loci Communes*). According to Melanchthon there is nothing wrong with O. T. law, it is to be preferred to that of the Gentiles and the Pope.

It is unfortunate that Luther took a less positive view of the O. T. but his main fear was of the law in the Pauline theological sense. He however guarded the unity of the Bible and severely rebuked his collaborator Johannes Agricola for over-stressing the distinction between the Old and New Testaments.

John Calvin has a chapter in his *Institutes* where he discusses the resemblance between the Old and New Testament. He begins with the premiss that there is no difference either in substance or reality between the covenants. God's covenant with the Patriarchs is the same as the covenant in Jesus Christ. The difference is only in administration. Calvin denies that the O. T. is spiritually deficient. The same God revealed Himself in both Testaments. The fact that Abraham is called the father of the faithful must be taken seriously. There is therefore an essential unity running through the whole Bible. The Covenant once ratified is eternal and unending. It is this same Covenant which is completed, fixed and ratified in Christ (cf. *Institutes*, II, X, 4). He allows however a difference between the two Testaments: the O. T. deals with one particular people, the N. T. is concerned with the salvation of the nations of the world. But as far as God's promises and grace are concerned, Calvin agrees with Augustine, that it is already embedded in the O. T. even *before* the giving of the Law.

It is however in the Anglo-Saxon lands that the O. T. celebrated its greatest triumphs. Cecil Roth, the Jewish historian, rightly observed: «the O. T. is even now no less potent a force in the modern world than the New.» Its powerful influence extends over all aspects of civilized life from literature to politics. English-speaking people have been reared on its stories, proverbs, parables and incidents for many centuries. To quote Roth again: «Generation after generation, the Englishman heard the Bible read in Church, and studied it at home. In many cases it was the only Book: in all, it was the principal

Book. At last its cadences, its music, its phraseology, sank into his mind and became part of his being» (*Jewish Contribution to Civilization*, 1945, 12). In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the spiritual and cultural history of the English is inextricably tied with the story of the English Bible. It has shaped the private and corporate character of the people of the British Isles. In some respects the O. T. exerted an even greater influence than the New.

There is thus a twofold story regarding the relationship of the Gentile Church to the O. T. It is both negative and positive depending upon historical circumstances and cultural conditions. Whenever the Gospel was understood as a radical new beginning, the O. T. was felt as an embarrassment, as in the case of Marcion. On the other hand, when it was understood in the context of historic continuity, the O. T. was revered as the very title-deeds of the Church, as in the case of the Reformers.

This brings us to our next problem: the link between the Old and New Testament.

### 3. *The historic link*

Those who realize that there is always a horizontal dimension to every new phenomenon in history, will look for antecedents in order to understand the sequence. We must always keep in mind that the bearers of tradition are not documents but people. When we enquire who were the people who constituted the followers of Jesus we arrive at an interesting fact: they were not the official leaders of the nation. They were not the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Scribes, or the Zealots (i. e. the ultra-nationalists, except perhaps with one exception; cf. Mtt. 10:4).

There has recently appeared a spate of literature to prove that Jesus was a political rebel whom the Church has turned into a Christian god. This is not a new idea. Two generations ago the Jewish scholar Robert Eisler produced several volumes to the same effect. More recently, Prof. G. F. Brandon has devoted his attention to the same subject. He has now produced several works in which he maintains that Jesus was a Jewish nationalist and probably a leader in the Zealot party. Others have written in the same vein relying upon

imagination more than evidence. But even Brandon has little to go by, except a few hints, the rest is inference. But the question still remains: what was the nature of Jesus' activity and who were his followers?

#### 4. *The «poor» in the O. T.*

There are several Hebrew terms to describe poverty. The *torah* has a special concern for the poor. The stranger, the widow, the orphan are frequently classed together by reason of their social handicap. Such people stand under God's special protection. The rights of the poor are to be guarded: «You shall not pervert the justice of the poor» (Ex. 23:6). The fields every seventh year are to be left fallow and what grows of its own accord must be left for the poor (Ex. 23:11). The Levites, the stranger, the widow and the orphans are singled out, for these were the landless or socially helpless (cf. 22: 21–24; Dt. 14:29; 26:12f.). If a farmer forgets a sheaf of corn in the field he is forbidden to go back for it: «it shall be for the stranger, the widows and the orphan» (Dt. 24:19). The same applies to harvesting the field – the border is to be left for the poor and the stranger and so are the gleanings (Lev. 23:22). Neither is the vineyard to be stripped bare or the fallen grapes to be gathered – these belong to the needy (Lev. 19:9f.).

These humane provisions, so characteristic for Mosaic law, are prompted by the ideal of social justice. No Israelite is meant to suffer poverty: «there will be no poor among you» (Dt. 15:4). Yet, because poverty is a persistent evil the injunction is to «open wide your hand to the needy and the poor in the land» (Dt. 15:11). The wages of the hired servant are not to be withheld, he is to be paid at the close of the day so as to prevent hardship (Lev. 13:13).

The great prophets never tire to indict the rich for oppressing and exploiting the poor: they grind the faces of the poor (Is. 3:15); they rob them of their right and spoil the widows and the fatherless (Is. 10:2); they devise ways to deceive the poor (Is. 32:7). Above all it is Amos who stands up as the champion of the poor. He pours scorn upon the self-indulging women «who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands ,Bring that we may drink'» (Amos 4:1); he threatens with God's judgement those who «sell the

righteous for silver, the needy for a pair of shoes and who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth» (2:6f.).

God is the defender of the poor and needy: He hears their cry (Ps. 69:33); He maintains their right (Ps. 140:12) and satisfies them with bread (Ps. 132:15).

The poor is naturally a humble person. In Hebrew parallelism the poor and the humble are frequently paired: 'ani (עַנִּי) means both poor and humble. Humble in Hebrew is 'anavah (עֲנוּתָה), these are linguistically related terms. There thus emerges another class of «poor» who are not suffering material privation but groan by reason of moral decadence and spiritual barrenness which afflicts the nation. These were the people who waited and prayed for the Lord's redemption. The prophet Malachi calls them the «God fearers» (ירְאֵי יְהוָה): «Then the God fearers spoke to one another; the Lord listened and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who feared the Lord and meditated on His name» (Mal. 3:16). These are God's humble people who cling to His promise and wait upon Him. The Holy One of Israel identifies Himself with them and takes up their cause:

For thus says high and lofty One who inhabits eternity whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a humble and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the humble' (Is. 57:15).

The two expressions: *shefal ruah* (שפָלָרָוֶת) and *lev dakka* (לב דָקָא) are typical Hebrew parallels which say the same thing: God is on the side of the 'anavim – the humble.

But we would mistake the case if we took it to mean that God's 'poor' or humble of whom the prophets speak are the moral characteristics of a few private individuals. «The quiet in the land» (Ps. 35:20) who suffer persecution at the hands of the wicked are a group of people who stand close to the prophets and follow in their tradition. They are the inner circle or the «remnant» whose cause will be vindicated when the right time comes in the providence of God. We may safely assume that each prophet had a coterie of followers on whom he could count. Isaiah explicitly mentions «disciples» among whom his testimony is to be bound and his teaching sealed (8:16). Such a disciple was Baruch who acted as Jeremiah's secretary (cf.

Jer. 36:18, 32). Ebedmelech the Ethiopian must have been yet another of Jeremiah's followers (cf. 39:15–18); so was probably Gedaliah the son of Ahikam (cf. 40:6), and there must have been many others of whom we do not know.

It was in the prophetic circles that a more ancient desert tradition survived. The Rechabites whom Jeremiah holds up before the nation as an example of faithful adherence to the tradition of their fathers were a desert tribe who resisted the enticements of city life. They drank no wine, built no houses but lived in tents, and did not engage in agriculture (Jer. 35). This clan obviously represented an old nomadic tradition related to the Hebrews which persisted till N. T. times (cf. Eusebius, H. E., II, 23). A similar desert tradition survived in Israel and Judah. Be it noted that the elaborate temple built in Jerusalem was an innovation which was resisted by some. This becomes evident from the remarkable passage in 2 Sam. 7. Here Nathan the prophet first chides David for dwelling in a house of cedar while the ark of the Lord dwells in a tent:

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, «Go and tell my servant David, ,Thus says the Lord: would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day...»

The text goes on to say that God was content to dwell in a tent and never asked for a house. It was not for David to build the Lord a house – rather the Lord would build a house for David.

The same uneasiness we still can sense in Solomon's prayer at the consecration of the Temple: «Will God dwell on earth? Behold, the heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built?» (1 Kings 8:27). These passages would not suffice to construe a case against the organized cult in Jerusalem had it not been for another remarkable fact. The prophets and even occasionally the Psalms, appear to be more than critical of the sacrificial cult. Scholars are puzzled about this. They find it difficult to accept so «progressive» a view of religion at so early a time. This does not fit with their assumed principle of progressive evolution. How could the Hebrew prophets, they ask, criticize the Temple cult at a time when sacrifices to propitiate the gods was the established

practice in all the other religions? Scholars therefore take the view that the prophets inveigh only against the misuse of the cult but not against the cult itself. Some passages lend themselves to such an interpretation but other passages go far beyond it. How is one to understand Is. 66 which begins with the statement: «The Heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool.» It proceeds to ask: «what is the house which you have built for me and what is the place of my rest?» This question is reminiscent of Solomon's prayer of consecration, but then it goes on to say that God looks for the humble and contrite heart, for the man who trembles at His word, and continues:

«He who slaughters an ox is like him who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like him who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a cereal offering, like him who offers swine's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like him who blesses an idol.»

The verse ends with the startling statement: «These have chosen their own ways and their soul delights in abominations» (Is. 66:1, 3).

Had this been an isolated passage we would still remain in some doubt as to its radical nature. But when added to similar statements by other prophets the criticism becomes more incisive. Amos denies that God asked for sacrifices, what he demands is justice (Amos 5:21 –25). Hosea makes a similar statement: «I desire *hesed* and not sacrifices, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings» (Hos. 6:6). Jeremiah contemptuously casts in the teeth of his hearers: «Add burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh!» He goes so far as to deny that God ever commanded them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices (Jer. 7:21f.). Isaiah in the very first chapter lets God say: «What is to me the multitude of your sacrifices? I have enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of he-goats», then comes the unexpected question: «who requires of you this trampling of my courts?» (Is. 1:11f.). Israelites have been led to believe that God requires it. What a strange question to ask!

There are other statements in the O. T. in a similar vein, but that such statements should occur in the Psalter is even more surprising. Traditionally the Psalter is associated with Temple worship. Yet Ps. 40 is explicit on this point:

«Sacrifices and offerings thou dost not desire . . . burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast not required . . .»

Interestingly enough, the singer of this psalm attributed to David describes himself as *'ani ve-’evion* ( עַנִּי וְאַבְיוֹן ) but we need not take this description in the literal sense. His poverty and need is of a spiritual kind; he belongs to those who seek the Lord and who love His salvation (cf. verse 16).

We thus find in the O. T. an attitude which transcends cultic worship and already points beyond the Temple made with hands, to a Temple made of living stones where are offered spiritual sacrifices to the Holy and Invisible God (1 Pet. 2:5).

##### 5. *The 'poor' in the N. T.*

The transition from the O. T. to the New came about by a gradual development of hopes, ideas and doctrines which are deposited in the collection of documents known as Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. The whole collection is of Jewish origin and has come down to us via the Christian Church. This in itself is remarkable because it indicates an affinity with the messianic movement associated with the name of Jesus and is strikingly different in tenor from rabbinic Judaism. The apocalyptic outlook which prevails in these writings proved suitable soil for the message of the Kingdom which Jesus preached. Our purpose here is not to give a survey of this literature but to point to one particular aspect, namely the concept of the 'poor'. A useful book is the collection of songs known as the Psalms of Solomon which apparently date from the middle of the first century B. C. In these songs the spiritual aspect of poverty is a prominent feature, it is part of the upright and moral life. God is on the side of the 'poor' – he is their refuge and strength (5:2). But for the poet the pious and the poor are synonyms (cf. 10:7). These poor and pious are contrasted with the profane man whose heart is removed from the Lord and who provokes Israel to transgression (5:1ff.). The translator of the text comments: «Here and throughout the Psalm the singular may refer collectively to the party opposed to the psalmist, or to the leader of that party . . .» (*Pseudepigrapha* ed. by R. H. Charles, 1964, p. 635f.). These poor and pious in contrast to the lawless and wicked are

described as «quiet souls» who hate unrighteousness and who follow the way of peace (12:1–6). The psalm ends with the wish:

«And let the sinners perish together at the presence of the Lord; but let the Lord's pious ones inherit the promises of the Lord.»

It is obvious that the 'poor' here as elsewhere means the pious who like innocent lambs» (8:28) suffer at the hands of the wicked. It has been suggested that these were not isolated individuals but «faithful and God-fearing Israelites, who held together and formed an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, as opposed to the worldly and indifferent, often also paganizing and persecuting, majority» (S. R. Driver, Hasting's *Dic. of the Bible*, IV, 20). Another writer explains that «the πτωχοί (poor) of these psalms are far removed from the arrogant, self-complacent Pharisees who opposed Christ» (H. Maldwyn Hughes, *Ethics of Jewish Apocryphal Literature*, p. 81), though this is perhaps too harsh an opinion of the much maligned Pharisees, there is a certain truth in it. A persecuted minority has always a moral edge over its persecutors.

There are two related passages in the N. T. which have been a puzzle to the commentators. Mtt. 5:3 reads: «Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.» The parallel text in Luke 6:20 reads: «Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of heaven.» The question arises: which is the more genuine rendering?

If we decide for the Lukian version then Jesus would appear to be a social reformer who is concerned with those who suffer under poverty. Luke shows special predilection for the poor and the handicapped (cf. Lk. 13:13, 21). But does Jesus have in mind solely those deprived of wealth? On the other hand, if we take the Matthean text it gives the impression that he is concerned with the intellectually deprived – he blesses the nitwits! Who then are the «poor in spirit»?

It seems to us that Kurt Schubert has the correct answer: the poor in spirit are «those who were willing to be poor even though outwardly they were still in possession of wealth. Poverty in spirit is therefore not an economic concept but a state of grace. The poor in spirit have seen through and overcome the enticement of riches.» Schubert continues to explain: «The poor in spirit are neither paupers nor simpletons but rather according to Is. 66:2, they are to be equated with the

pious and the obedient to God's word.» He finds a similar concept in some of the Qumran texts (cf. Kurt Schubert, *The Dead Sea Community*, E. T., 1959, p. 137f.).

It seems to us that Schubert is right in connecting the beatitude of those who are poor in spirit with the warning that no one can serve two masters (Mtt. 6:24): You cannot serve God and mammon. It is interesting to note that the phrase: «unrighteous mammon» peculiar to Luke (16:9) has almost an identical parallel in the Qumran text: *hon hamas* «wealth of injustice» (*Manual of Discipline* 10:19). Both the early Church and the Qumran community were suspicious of wealth, not because it is evil in itself but because it makes for enslavement and exploitation. Wealth is to be shared not hugged: «where your treasure is, there will your heart be also» (Luke 12:33). «A man's life», says Jesus, «does not consist in the abundance of his possessions» (Luke 12:15). He tells the story of the rich fool who said to himself: «take your ease, eat, drink and be merry». But that very night his soul was required: «So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God» (Luke 13:18–21).

There is here an interesting paradox involved: the rich are poor and the poor are rich. To be rich toward God requires a certain attitude of simplicity, humility and trust which the sermon on the Mount paraphrases as «poor in the spirit».

God's humble people will in the end possess the Kingdom. When Jesus said «Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth», he was only quoting the O. T. (Ps. 37:11). But already in this Psalm there is an identification of the «meek» (*anavim* v. 11) with those who «wait upon God» (*kove Adonai* v. 9). This concept runs through the whole of the N. T. Jesus thanks God for revealing to babes what remains hidden to the wise and understanding (Mtt. 11:25). It is obvious that «babes» are not meant to describe infants but the single-minded and innocent. At another place he says encouragingly, «Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom» (Luke 12:32). The sequence to this is of special significance. The text continues: «Sell your possessions, and give alms, provide yourselves with purses that grow not old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail . . .» (v. 33). Jesus himself travelled lightly and he expects his disciples to do likewise.

The paradox of discipleship which is riches in poverty is exemplified in the life of the Messiah: «the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head» (Mtt. 8:20). Paul writing to the Corinthians says of Jesus «though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich» (2 Cor. 8:9). This is no reference to material riches but to becoming rich toward God. It is the privilege of the disciple to remain poor for the sake of others. This is the secret of the believer's life: «as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything» (2 Cor. 6:10).

## 6. *The Ebionites*

The characteristic prophetic emphasis upon inwardness rather than cultic ceremonial has remained a constant challenge within Israel. The *torah* does not only prescribe outward observances but also circumcision of the heart (Dt. 10:16). Jeremiah calls for the same attitude: «Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskin of your heart» (Jer. 4:4). This striving for inwardness has embedded itself into the consciousness within the best of the Hebrew people. The extra-canonical literature of the later period bears ample evidence to this fact. A document known as the Letter to Aristeas dating back to about 134 B. C. displaces the importance of the Temple cult by giving it a symbolic interpretation. To the writer of the Letter God is better honored by purity of spirit than by offerings and sacrifices (cf. Moses Hadas's transl. p. 191f.). A similar attitude we meet in the Psalms of Solomon. Here the righteous make atonement for sin not by sacrificing in the temple but by fasting and affliction of soul (3:9); they cleanse themselves by making confession (9:12). This is a new and inward way of dealing with sin by which the temple cult becomes redundant.

Most of the epigraphical documents had their origin in the Diaspora where the temple was more remote and where extraneous influences were more persistent. But there was enough within the O. T. tradition to encourage and sustain this kind of attitude. The document called the Secrets of Enoch which belongs to the first century A. D. has this remarkable passage: «When the Lord demands bread, or candles,

or flesh (i. e. cattle) or any other sacrifice, then that is nothing, but God demands pure hearts, and with all that only tests the heart of man» (45:3).

Here an important shift is taking place from outward ceremonial towards inward purity. We have already seen that this attitude is adumbrated by prophetic utterance. Jesus' great messianic manifesto which is known as the Sermon on the Mount (Mtt. 5–7) addresses itself to those in Israel who strive for a richer life toward God. They are those «who hunger and thirst for righteousness» (Mtt. 5:6); they are the «merciful», «the pure in heart», «the peace-makers», «the sons of God» (Mtt. 5:7–9). Jesus pronounces them blessed: «Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven» (v. 10).

When we ask the question: who were the followers of Jesus, we find here the answer. These were the men and women who waited for the consolation of Israel like the saintly Simeon. He is described as a man righteous and devout, with the gift of the Holy Spirit upon him (Luke 2:25). Another such person was the prophetess Hannah (Luke 2:36). To the same circle would belong the priest Zachariah and his wife Elisabeth, the parents of Yohanan the Baptizer (cf. Luke 1:8ff.). It is noteworthy that Mary the Mother of Jesus was a kinswoman of Elisabeth. These were full-blooded Jews, devoted to the service of God and looking for His Kingdom. In the case of Zachariah we have a priest who performed service in the Temple, yet belonged to those who looked beyond the cult. It shows that the position was a fluid one specially in Judaea where cultic worship was more closely integrated with daily life.

As far as the immediate followers of Jesus were concerned, we hear nothing about their personal involvement in the sacrificial cult, though they are frequently in the temple as is Jesus himself. There is here an ambivalence which is not easily dissolved. Jesus is concerned with the purity of the Temple and drives out the money changers (Mk. 11:15), He even consents to paying the Temple-tax, though He modifies this by the desire «not give offense» (Mtt. 17:24–27). The temple is described as the Temple of God (Mtt. 21:12). Yet at the same time Jesus is accused of having said ,I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not

made with hands' (Mk. 14:58). According to the evidence of John he actually said something like it (John 2:19).

The same ambivalence is to be found in the messianic community after the Crucifixion of Jesus. The Christian believers preach in the Temple, pray in the Temple, but we never hear of their offering sacrifices (Acts 2:46; 3:3ff.; 4:1ff.; etc.). There seems to be implicit in the Gospel message the protest against localising God: The Most High does not dwell in Temples made with hands (Acts 7:48; 17:24). According to John Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: «the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship Him» (John 4:19ff.).

It is the same aspect of inwardness we have encountered in the prophetic writings and the pseudepigraphic literature that we meet in the early church. The «poor in the spirit» are the humble saints of God who accept the Good News of the Servant of God, namely the Messiah.

Jesus knew Himself to have come not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Mtt. 20:28). There is here an echo of the Servant Songs in Isaiah and specially of the great chapter 53. It is therefore not surprising that the early Jewish disciples called themselves *Ebionim* – the Poor Ones. They may have been poor in wordly goods, but this was not the main reason for their name. They called themselves the Poor Ones because of their desire to be rich toward God. Prof. W. D. Davies is right in his view that Matthew made the term «poor» as rendered by Luke «more precise by the addition ,in the spirit», but in essence both terms have the same connotation – these men and women were ,poor' before God before they were poor before men (cf. W. D. Davies, *The setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 1964, p. 251 note).

The memory of the indigenous Hebrew Christians became confused in later centuries, and for good reason. Quite early in the development of the Jewish-Christian community the term Ebionim applied to at least three different groups of Jewish Christians.

First, there were those who accepted the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth, but rejected the Virgin birth, ascribed no divine powers

to the Messiah, holding that he was a mere man, «nothing more than a descendent of David, and not also the Son of God»; though greater than the prophets (cf. Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, XIV). From Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons (c. 130–c. 200 A. D.) we learn that this Jewish sect adhered to the *torah*, observed the customs, repudiated the Apostle Paul, only used the Gospel according to Matthew, practised circumcision and were so Judaic in their style of life that they even adored Jerusalem «as if it were the house of God» (cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, XXVI, 2). We may safely assume that this was the group which not only adhered to the Mosaic law but demanded of all Gentile converts to do the same. There is some hint of this in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (ch. 48) – a document from the middle of the second century.

The second group of Ebionites and probably the larger one, accepted the Virgin Birth and ascribed special divine authority and power to Jesus as Messiah. This we know from the evidence of Justin and more explicitly from Origen, the Alexandrian Greek father (c. 185 – c. 254). He mentions a «twofold sect of the Ebionites, who either acknowledge with us that Jesus was born of the Virgin, or deny this and maintain that He was begotten like other human beings ...» (cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, V, 61). This group also adhered to the Law of Moses but did not demand the same loyalty from non-Jews. According to them the Gentiles who became believers were free from the Law on the basis of the decree of the early Church that they keep only the Noachian commandments (cf. Acts 15:19ff.). These commandments according to rabbinic tradition were given to the sons of Noah, and consisted of basic moral precepts (cf. *Encyclp. of the Jewish Religion*, 1965, p. 287a). These tolerant Hebrew Christians were in communion with the Gentile believers but maintained their loyalty to Jewish tradition.

The term Ebionites (Ἐβιώναιοι) does not appear in the patristic literature before about 175 A. D. By the beginning of the 3rd century the memory of their origin was already confused. Tertullian, taking his clue from fact that heresies usually stem from the influence of an individual who becomes the leader, assumes that there was a man called Ebion who started the sect. Other writers, like Hippolytus and Epiphanius follow suit. Epiphanius even appears to know the

name of Ebion's birthplace, a hamlet called Cochabe in Palestine (cf. Epiphanius, *Haeres.* XXX). Of modern scholars Hilgenfeld seems to be the only one who accepted the fictitious name of Ebion as a fact.

This brings us to the third group.

By the time Origen wrote his treatise against Celsus the meaning of the «poor in the spirit» was already lost. To explain the name of the Ebionites the Alexandrian scholar falls back upon etymology but with mischievous intent: he says they received their name «from the poverty of the law, according to the literal acceptance of the word; for Ebion signifies ‚poor‘ among the Jews...» (*C. Celsum*, II, 1). In another treatise he applies the term «poor» to the Ebionites in the sense of their limited understanding and the poverty of their intellect (cf. Origen, *De principiis* IV, I, 22, Greek version). It is obvious that Origen reveals his bias against both the Mosaic law and people who adhered to it. He does not seem to know of a third group of Ebionites who were Jewish believers in the messiahship of Jesus but did not differ from the rest of Christians except by origin.

Were there such?

The evidence of their existence is embedded in the N. T. records. Saul of Tarsus was not the only one who represented a high Christology, who preached the Gospel to the Gentiles without demanding observance of the Law and who declared believing Jews and Gentiles brothers in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28; cf. also Rom. 10:12). There was Barnabas, a Cyprian Levite; there was Mark John of Jerusalem; there was Simon Peter himself who collaborated; there were the brethren of the mother-church in Jerusalem who offered their right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas (cf. Acts 15:22); there were many, many others who held similar views (cf. J. Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, 1949, p. 190ff.).

An apocryphal document of essentially Jewish origin called the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, part of which is probably the work of a Jewish Christian contains a passage which scholars regard an interpolation by a Jewish Christian hand. This passage, its date cannot be determined, gives a much more accurate picture of the Hebrew Christian position than can be obtained from the Church Fathers. Part of the text reads with obvious reference to Jesus:

«And I (looked and) saw a man going out from the left side of the heathen; and there went out men and women and children, from the side of the heathen, many hosts, and worshipped him. And while I still looked there came out from the right side (many), and some insulted that man, while some struck him; others, however worshipped him . . .»

Abraham is made to ask the question: «O Eternal, Mighty One! Who is the man insulted and beaten . . .?»

And he answered and said: «Hear, Abraham! The man thou sawest insulted and beaten and again worshipped is the relief (*anesis menuha;*) by the heathen to the people who proceed from thee . . . There shall be many from the heathen who set their hopes upon him . . . and as for those whom thou sawest from the right side . . . — many of them shall be offended at him. He, however, is testing those who have worshipped him of thy seed . . .» (*The Apocalypse of Abraham*, transl. from the Slavonic by G. H. Box, 1919, p.79f.).

Though the text is corrupt and the meaning not always clear the general picture of this passage is obvious: the Messiah is identified as a descendent of Abraham. Those on the left side are Gentile believers, a large multitude of men, women and children. Those on the right side are Jews: some insult him; some strike him; some worship him; some are tested, probably under persecution from their own kinsmen and are in danger of falling away.

In the light of the story of the Jewish attitude to Jesus the picture as drawn by this anonymous Hebrew Christian appears remarkably true to life: there are those who persecute, those who take offence, and those who worship. The worshippers described are believing Jews who constitute the third group. The Church fathers have lost sight of them because they had become integrated into the Gentile Church. Between them and the Gentile believers there was no barrier. That the Gentiles joined the people of God was a matter for rejoicing. They saw in it the beginning of messianic fulfilment. As God's 'poor' people they asked for no acknowledgement, sought no privileges, wanted no favours. True to their Master's spirit they were prepared to go the second mile, turn the other cheek, and give away their cloak (Mtt. 5:38ff.). The poor in the spirit do not stand upon their rights.

The tradition of God's 'poor' has survived both in the Church and in the Synagogue. The legend about the thirty-six saints (*lamed*

*vav*) for whose sake the world is not destroyed well dramatizes the biblical concept of God's 'poor'. In Jewish legend these righteous men live unrecognized by the world and unknown to themselves. They perform the most menial tasks and live humble lives. But they are rich toward God and enjoy the sight of His Presence (cf. *Sanh.* 97b).

According to the Zohar there are two sets of thirty-six secret saints. One would like to think that by introducing a second group, pious Jews were making concession to the saints of the Church. Sholem Asch, in his moving novel *Salvation* portrays one of each – a Jewish rabbi and a Roman Catholic priest. Both fight for the soul of a woman for the sake of God. Both are lovers of God and of man though history and tradition divides them. They both belong to the «poor in spirit» whom Jesus came to unite. He came to remove the middle-wall of partition and to make of the two «one new man» (Eph. 2:14f.).

The ideal of poverty and humility was kept alive within the monastic movement and has survived to this day. Although the official Church was frequently prostituted by wealth and the pomp of its hierarchy it could never forget that the Master it served was a humble carpenter. Thomas à Kempis laid down the rule: «Whosoever would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must endeavour to conform his life wholly to the life of Christ.» The main point of living is not to live long but to live well. To live well means to live in the fear of God: «Surely», says Thomas, «an humble peasant who serves God, is better than a proud philosopher who, neglecting himself, is occupied with studying the course of the heavens». To be a believer, according to Thomas à Kempis, means to put all hope in God: he would rather be poor for God's sake, than rich without Him. He cries out: «Rejoice you that are humble, and you that are poor be filled with joy, for yours is the Kingdom of God» (*De imitatio Christi*).

What we need today, in our age of misplaced values and unjustified pride, is to recapture the meaning of God's 'poor' people. This we can only do at the Cross of the Servant of God who gave Himself away for the sake of others. This is the meeting place where Jews and Gentiles can hear in true humility the Master's voice: «Blessed are the poor-in-spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God!»