

12. JESUS/YESHUA

Jesus (Yeshua ben Yosef in Hebrew) was born in Bethlehem around the year 6 BC. He conducted his public activities primarily in Galilee. He died in Jerusalem on a Roman cross around the time of the Jewish Passover in the year 30 AD. His short life defined the history of the world into a before and an after.

With both his friends and enemies he spoke Aramaic and Hebrew. These were the languages in which he prayed and taught. He read the *Torah* in Hebrew. But with the exception of a few Hebrew and Aramaic phrases recorded in the Gospels, the original language of his preaching was lost in the span of a few decades. As his movement became more widely known to the people, his words were proclaimed in the Greek language, and in fact the New Testament texts known to us today are in Greek. Professor Emanuela Prinzivalli from Rome's *La Sapienza* University, wrote: "The Gospel message was thus first transmitted in Greek, being the predominant language, which had in fact become the first language spoken by Diaspora Jews. The subsequent development of a corpus of Christian scriptures merely reproduces what had been the history of the Hebrew scriptures in the Diaspora, with the Greek translation, known as the Septuagint, produced specifically for the Greek-speaking Jews themselves, but with a number of adaptations to the Greek mindset and the composition of the *Letter of Aristeas*, which views Jewish wisdom as the loftiest expression of Hellenistic wisdom. In fact, the history of Christianity is more complex and radical, since, on the basis of what has been handed down to us, there are no traces of early Christian writings in Aramaic, and only in a few cases do we have clear evidence of the possible composition of the Gospels in Hebrew."⁸⁷

The term *euangélion* is a translation of the original biblical Hebrew words *besorah tovah*, meaning 'good news'. It eventually came to denote some clearly defined texts that inaugurated a new literary genre. *Euangélion* first appears in what is considered to be the oldest of the New Testament writings, dating from the middle of the first century: The First Letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians. At the beginning of the letter, the apostle, speaking of the spread of the Gospel, explains its meaning: the good news consists in the conversion to *Eloqim*: "you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Clearly, in full accordance with the Jewish faith, this is a proclamation of salvation extended to the Gentiles, who, in view of the imminent end, are also invited through Jesus the Messiah (*Yeshua ha-Mashiach*) to share in the salvation that *Eloqim* has already offered to Israel, with whom he has made a permanent covenant.

⁸⁷ E. Prinzivalli, *Cristianesimo e cultura classica. Modalità retoriche in alcuni testi cristiani (I ex-II in.)*, *Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 2013, XXIV, 21-34: 24.

The rediscovery of Jesus' Jewishness has been a major development in the Jewish-Christian dialogue of the last decades. "Jesus was and always remained a Jew," read the *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism*, published in 1985 by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. For centuries, Jesus has been de-Judaised, alienated, Greekised, Latinised, Europeanised and de-Christianised. It is therefore necessary to restore him to his true origin. A more authentic knowledge of Jesus thus requires a better understanding of Judaism.

Over the last century, the Jewish Jesus has been an important focus of Jewish scholarship. These include, most notably, the works of Joseph Klausner (1874-1958), Jules Isaac (1877-1963), Martin Buber (1878-1965), Schalom Ben Chorin (1913-1999), David Flusser (1917-2000), and many more.⁸⁸

Martin Buber has even argued that the community of Israel will recognise Jesus not only as a great figure of its religious history, but also in the context of a millennia-long development whose ultimate goal is the redemption of Israel and the world. It has been said that Jesus is like a bracket that connects Jews and Christians, leading them to pursue with mutual respect their common objective of achieving brotherhood among the whole of humanity, in a world of security and peace, through their faith in God and the coming of His Kingdom.

"Before asking who rejected and killed Jesus, we should ask who welcomed him. [...] The Jews are the ones who welcomed Jesus. Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, Peter and Andrew, James and John, the other apostles, all the first disciples, Ananias and Paul, and the thousands of members of the first Judeo-Christian community. They did not follow Jesus with the intention of abandoning the faith of their fathers. On the contrary, they followed him in full fidelity to the covenant and the promises made to Israel",⁸⁹ writes Father Etienne Emmanuel Vetö, director of the Cardinal Bea Centre for Jewish Studies at Rome's Gregorian University in Rome. The Church has no desire to replace Israel, but is rather the eschatological people born of the grafting of the Gentiles onto the Chosen People, the wild branch grafted onto the holy root, and since the roots of a tree are not its past but its present, "it is necessary to recognise the enormous debt of the Church and of Christianity to the Jewish people and its faith."⁹⁰ The Second Vatican Council states: "Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues."⁹¹

There will be no 'final conversion of Israel', but the recognition of the Messiah will take place when the anti-Messianic witness of the nations has come to an end.

This recognition will be of such importance that, according to Shaul, it will ultimately culminate in the *eschaton* and the resurrection of the dead: "For if the casting away

88 J. Sievers, *Gesù di Nazareth visto da scrittori ebrei del XX secolo*, which can be found at https://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01111997_p-48_it.html (visited on 11.07.2021).

89 Preface to J.M. Sweeney (ed.), *Gesù non fu ucciso dagli ebrei. Le radici cristiane dell'antisemitismo*, tr. by A. Montanari, Edizioni Terra Santa, Milano 2020, 20-21.

90 *Ivi*, 22.

91 *Nostra Aetate*, 4.

of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Rm 11:15).

Bibliography

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