

Monastic Scribe LXXXIV: January 17, 2025

WE ARE JOINT HEIRS

The simultaneous occurrence of Christian Christmas and Jewish Hanukkah this year struck me as being rather significant. I read of families where the two spouses are each one of these religions. In ordinary years they try to celebrate both feasts, especially with children, at different times of the month. But what do you do when they overlap? Attempts at melding them as Christukah or Hanumas were mentioned. Amusing on one hand, but perhaps prophetic on the other hand.

I have come to believe and desire that Judaism and Christianity ought to be one religion. No, I don't have a plan to bring this about but I simply want it to be. Lots of obstacles of course but we have to start believing and desiring. First of all, Jesus was a Jew until the day of his death. It is questioned that he wanted to start a new religion but that he was embracing the tradition, the prophets, etc. Then Saint Paul, who sometimes is called the real founder of Christianity, was a Jew too. He practiced his Judaic heritage. Yes, he wanted to preach to the Gentiles but he thought he was bringing them into the covenant with the Jews, not supplanting them. He believed that God's choice of the Jews was irrevocable. I find Jewish rituals, especially those around the family and meals are very attractive to our often staid Christian rituals. Can Confirmation size up to a Bar Mitzvah?

The gospel of John was written some fifty years later than Paul. It was a time of conflict between many Jews and the new Way that those Jewish followers of Yeshua were following. Hearts were becoming hardened. This is a terrible shame. The gospel of John exudes a mystical insight into God and Jesus and focuses on love. But, unfortunately, a number of statements in his gospel are clearly antisemitic. They were used by Saints Augustine and John Chrysostom in their teaching. John 8:44 is credited for justifying the hatred and persecution of Jews as God-killers. Not too long ago Pope Francis referred to this verse in a homily on the work of the devil in our lives. It is not sure what he (or his writer) meant but it has done a lot of damage.

Other happenings gratefully point to a newer appreciation of Judaism for Christians. A new book recently published is entitled, "Judaism is about Love – Recovering the heart of Jewish life" written by Rabbi Shai Held. The thesis of this book is to shatter the longstanding caricature of Judaism as a religion of law as opposed to the Christian focus on love, mercy and interiority. The image of God in

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the common belief of many Christians, and a number of Jews as well, is that the God of Judaism is a God of wrath but the God of Christianity is a God of love. The first line of the book is "Judaism is not what you think it is." This is heartening, promising, and enlightening.

Amy-Jill Levine, professor of scripture at Vanderbilt University, has been reflecting for some years on the gospel and new testament in the light of its Jewish foundation. Her work has helped to bridge the gulf between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures. She helps us to know Jesus in a different way.

The time is right to see each other more clearly. This year will be the sixtieth anniversary of the Vatican Council document, *Nostra Aetate*. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was a friend of Pope John XXIII and helped the Council to embrace this document. This was Catholicism's solemn testimony before the Jewish people and the world that they know what antisemitism is, admit their past implication in it, reject it, and commit the church to a new and better relationship. It is sad that some hard Catholic traditionalists continue to lament and reject this teaching. There is still a long way to go.

All of this has been complicated by October 7, 2023, and the subsequent acts of torture, warfare, killings and destruction. An increase of antisemitism in the west has accompanied this disaster. This requires of those of us who are followers of the Torah and Jesus Christ to do our part in overcoming centuries of hatred and mistreatment. Many Jews have been traumatized by the repeated acts of violence and seclusion against them. The Holocaust is still fresh in all our memories. But each of us, especially Christians, have to understand this history better and our complicity in it. We have to acknowledge the antisemitism that lodges in our own hearts, and oppose it in our society and church.

My dream of us being one faith will take time and much work to overcome the obstacles, beliefs, history, trauma and anger. But I feel we must begin with the desire and dream that it comes to pass. What do you think? You can let me know at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org.

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.