

This book was originally published in German under the title *Wem
Gehört Jesus?*
© 1989 Kösel Verlag, Munich

English translation © 1992 by Templegate Publishers

All rights reserved. Except for brief passages quoted in a newspaper,
magazine, radio, or television review, no part of this book may be
reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, in-
cluding photocopying and recording, or by any information storage
and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 0-87243-194-0

Templegate Publishers
302 East Adams Street
P. O. Box 5152
Springfield, Illinois 62705

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
1. From Polemic to Dialogue	9
The Persecution of the Jews	13
Wars Against Those of Other Faiths	17
Repression of Dissenters	20
The Spiritual Assumptions of Intolerance	23
The Change	25
2. Return of the Prodigal Son: Jesus in Judaism	28
Legends, Polemic, Apologetic	28
Approaches to Jesus	33
Jesus—A “Jew Among Jews”	36
Jewish Novelists on Jesus	46
Results, Questions, Consequences	48
3. Son of Man and Son of God: Jesus in Christianity	51
New Testament Profession of Christ	51
From the Christ of the Gospels to the Jesus of History	58
Jesus’s Claim	62
True God and True Man	65
Portrayals of Christ	71
4. Allah’s Prophet and Envoy: Jesus in Islam	74
Episodes About Jesus	74
The Death and Elevation of Jesus	80
Jesus the Prophet	82
The “Christ of Islam” is the Koran	87
5. Who Is God?	89
“Yahweh, Our God, is One”	90
“In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”	98
“There Is No God But Allah”	108

6.	Are the Religions Ways to Salvation?	117
	No Salvation Outside the Church?	118
	Revelation in the Religions	121
	Notes	130
	Sources, Abbreviations	137
	Special Terms	139
	Time Table	143

Introduction

Before the orthodox Jew begins his morning prayers, he puts on his phylactery. This has small capsules attached to it which contain four texts from the bible written on parchment strips (Ex 13. 2-10; 11-16; Deut 6. 4-9; 11. 13-21). These capsules are fastened to the forehead and left arm, on the side of the heart, by the phylactery straps. Before a Muslim says his obligatory prayers five times a day, he spreads a carpet or a piece of clothing or something similar on the floor and kneels down on it.

A Christian might well shake his head at this behavior as strange to him. He is often not aware that in Judaism these texts from the Bible are to be taken literally, the point being that God's great actions to his people are written in their hearts and on their foreheads and bound to their wrists (Ex 13. 9, 16; Deut 6. 8; 11. 18). It is also likely that a Christian is just as unfamiliar with Islamic prayer rules, according to which a place of worship must be prepared by laying a carpet on the floor when it is not possible to go to the mosque. How many Christians have ever given a thought to the idea that perhaps their religious beliefs and practices of worship are also incomprehensible to members of another faith? For example how do Jews and Muslims react at the sight of a Catholic who goes into church on a Saturday afternoon, dips his hand into a basin of water, touches his forehead, chest (or belly), and shoulders with his wet fingers, bends one knee quickly to the ground, and then makes his way into a dark box to pay a short visit to a man shut up in it?

The more one unquestionably affirms one's own beliefs the more foreign one is likely to find both the religious practices and the religious convictions of others. But is there actually such a thing as a faith which will not permit questioning? Does a Christian really take it as self-evident that the salvation of the whole of mankind at any given time should be linked, of all people, to the carpenter's son from Nazareth, the back of beyond, who managed to win over a couple of Galilean fishermen who then took to their heels after his deplorable failure and fled? Certainly one can and should ask how this particular bungler could have been proclaimed the Messiah and Redeemer of all mankind

so soon after his shameful death on the cross. Or can it be that it is precisely in this way that the truth of Christianity is demonstrated? The followers of Judaism continue to wait for the Messiah with undiminished hope, and Muhammad founded a new religion almost six hundred years after Christ's death, which at times spread just as rapidly as Christianity, and whose truth for the Muslims is unquestionable.

Each of the three great monotheistic religions has crucial grounds for justification which—at least from the point of view of their adherents—cannot really be refuted. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) alludes to this in his famous parable of the rings in "Nathan the Wise" (Act 111. sc.7.); in the end, these three religions are only different historical concrete forms of human piety. He compares belief in God to a ring which is passed from father to son through the generations.

Then came this ring, from son to son
At last to father of three sons,
All three obeyed him equally,
All three it follows he loved equally
And could not loose himself from them.
From time to time, he often found
Each child alone with him,
And then, his generous heart
Not 'twixt the other two divided,
It seemed first one
And then the other, then the third
Worthier the ring: which
He, in pious weakness had to each
Son promised. This state went on
As long as it could go. But then
His hour came round, and he was in
Perplexity. It pained him so
To grieve two of the three—
All trusted in his word.
What could he do?
In secret sent he for a jeweller;
Two other rings he ordered
In shape and pattern as his own,
No cost or effort to be spared

To make the copies congruent.
Success attended on the jeweller.
And when he gave the father back
His own true ring, he could himself
Not tell it from the other two.
Joyfully he called in turn
His sons, gave each in turn
His blessing and his ring;
And then he died.

What follows now was bound to come.
Scarce was the father dead, and each
Son with his ring will each be ruler
Of the house. In vain all quarrels
Questioning and blame—the father's
Ring could not be proved. Almost
As hard it is for us to prove
The one true faith.

In the end, can we come to terms with this question of belief? Can the whole of human life be based upon a "perhaps," which, if one thinks ahead consequentially, affects not only the truth of one's own religion, but of every religion ("None of your three rings is genuine") and furthermore, affects even their foundation—the very existence of God? Do we not rather seek certainties worth living—and dying for?

These questions and their respective problems will be examined in detail in this book. The reader cannot fail to notice that the author argues the phenomenon of religion and concrete religious manifestations from a Christian point of view, but in a very factual manner. Objectivity is achieved not simply by eliminating one's own assumptions of thought and personal convictions (which is not possible), but by remaining conscious of them.

This book is mainly concerned with the status of Jesus in the three great monotheistic religions. The fact that Jesus from the Christian viewpoint represents the fullness of God's revelation gives rise to a vast number of questions which are dealt with, at least in passing, in the first and the last two chapters: what is the connection between the claim to absolutism of Christianity as "the one true religion" and the absolutist ways and methods by which it constantly seeks to impose this claim

(thus betraying the intentions of its founder)? Does the divine image of Jesus really differ so radically from his image in Judaism and in Islam? Is Jesus in fact the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim 2.5), when there is also genuine—and that implies divine—revelation in other religions?

This book has had to confine itself only to what is essential, because there is no one Judaism, no one Christianity and no one Islam. To some degree extremely varied directions and movements exist within these religions themselves, which a summarizing, comparative overview cannot possibly take into account. And it is with just such an overview, which does not pursue apologetics or polemics but seeks to offer information and orientation, that we are here concerned. Both *the differences in teaching* and, within the realms of the possible, developments *within the teachings* will be incorporated.

Only a closer acquaintance with other religions makes it possible for us to revise our judgement and correct misunderstandings. Apart from this, a confrontation with other points of view enables us to contribute a great deal towards a better understanding of our own position. Naturally dialogue between the religions can only exist in an atmosphere of tolerance, in which it is assumed that one will go out to meet unfamiliar convictions with that same open-mindedness towards others that one expects for oneself, and that one will also respect the convictions of those who think differently, even when one cannot share them.

1 From Polemic to Dialogue

The ecumenical decree "Unitatis redintegratio" (issued on November 21, 1964), the declaration of the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions "Nostra aetate" (October 28, 1965) and the declaration of religious freedom "Dignitatis humanae" (December 7, 1965) are among the most remarkable documents of the Second Vatican Council.

What could be termed a prelude to these documents, the founding of the Secretariat of Unity (Segretario per l'unità dei cristiani) by Pope John XXIII on June 5, 1960 aimed to nurture and deepen the relationship between the Catholic Church and the other Christian confessions. The founding of two further secretariats by Pope Paul VI on January 6, 1966 served to corroborate and deepen the Council's resolutions. One of the secretariats aimed to provide an institutional basis for dialogue with non-Christians, the other for discussions with non-believers.

The historical importance of these theoretical announcements and their practical provisions only become really clear when one makes a comparison with the past. Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical of 1928 "Mortalium animos" described with little respect those who were interested in ecumenicism as "panchristiani," which can most accurately be translated as "commonplace Christians." The Church law first proclaimed in 1917 and valid until the appearance of the new codex in 1983, forbade Catholics to take part in religious discussions with non-Catholics without permission from the pope or the appropriate bishops. (can. 1325 par. 3).

The "Syllabus" published by Pius IX in 1864 (a kind of list of "modernist errors") proclaimed that the opinion that men are at liberty to profess any religion if they are convinced of its truth, is heretical (DS 2915).¹ In his pastoral letter "Quanta cura" the same Pope announced in the same year that the call for freedom of conscience and religious worship was incompatible with church teaching (D 1690). He was referring expressly to the 1832 encyclical "Mirari vos arbitramur" of Pope Gregory XVI, in which the latter had denounced the right to freedom of conscience as "an absurd point of view, or even insane" (absurda ac erronea sententia seu potius delireamentum; DS 2730) and as "an extremely pernicious error" (pestilentissimus error; DS 2731). Certainly

these statements resulted from the demand for an extreme ethical autonomy of human reason and referred to modern indifference. But this does not excuse the unconcerned attitude of church teaching and its blindness towards the dignity of the human conscience.

The line from Gregory XVI can be traced straight back to Leo X, who in his papal bull "Exurge Domine" of 1520 qualified a group of Martin Luther's sentences as incompatible with Catholic belief — amongst others (and here the reader is not the victim of an optical illusion) the reformer's statement that it was against the will of God to burn heretics (DS 1483).

From today's point of view it is understandable that people were reluctant to place their church at the disposal of dissenters for the spread of their own teachings, just as Luther at one time would never have dreamt of allowing Catholic priests to preach before a Protestant congregation in compliance with an "exchange of pulpit." The fact that the faithful were warned against contact with "false teachers" is also understandable, indeed comprehensible today. But the decision of the Third Lateran Council of 1179, which forbade the faithful on pain of interdict (*sub anathemate prohibemus*) to grant these false teachers lodgings in their houses, to linger on their property or even to do business with them seems—to put it mildly—somewhat strange (D 401). In contrast to a broadly accepted view, the embargo was not Napoleon's invention.

If, however, we go back a little further into history, we cannot simply leave it at the fact that those among the faithful who did not unreservedly accept the official teaching were banned from the church community. We should not underestimate the power that binding and loosing had over the masses (Mt 18.18). The curse attached to excommunication was as awe-inspiring as it was terrible. The formulae used for it stem largely from the church criminal laws of the Middle Ages. The following example illustrates what the term "Anathema sit" (he is anathema; he is banned from the church) originally meant, or at least implied:

"In the authority of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as in the holy canon, the holy and undefiled Virgin and Mother of God, all the heavenly hosts, the angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, powers, cherubim and seraphim, the holy patriarchs, prophets, all

the apostles and evangelists, the holy innocents, who alone were found worthy to sing the new song before the Lamb, the holy martyrs, the holy confessors, and the holy virgins and all the saints and the chosen of God together excommunicate and curse this thief or evildoer, and we banish him from the threshold of God's holy Church, so that for his torment he shall be seized by everlasting punishment with Dathan and Abiron and those who here said to our Lord and God: Retreat from us, for we do not wish the knowledge of thy ways. As fire is quenched by water, so shall his light be quenched for ever, unless he reflects and does satisfaction. Amen. May God curse him, the Father who created men; may the Son of God curse him, he who suffered for men; may the Holy Spirit curse him, who is poured out in baptism. May the Holy Cross curse him, which Christ, in his triumph over his enemies ascended for our salvation. May the holy Mother of God and the perpetual Virgin Mary curse him, may the holy Michael who is the escort of the holy souls curse him; may all the angels and archangels curse him, the dominions and powers and the whole militia of the heavenly army. May the holy John, the forerunner and great baptizer of Christ curse him. May the holy Peter, the holy Paul, the holy Andrew, all Christ's apostles curse him, also the other disciples, also the four evangelists who converted the whole world through their preaching. May the magnificent host of martyrs and confessors, who were found well-pleasing (to God) for their good works curse him. May the choirs of holy virgins curse him, who for the sake of Christ's honor abhorred the vanities of this world. May all the saints curse him, who from the beginning of the world through all eternity have appeared beloved of God. May heaven and earth and all that is holy within them curse him. May he be cursed wherever he finds himself, at home, in the field, on the road, on the field path, in the forest, in water, in the church. May he be cursed when he dies, when he eats, when he drinks, when he hungers or thirsts, when he fasts, when he falls asleep, when he slumbers, when he is awake, when he goes, when he stands, when he sits, when he lies, when

he works, when he rests, when he urinates, when he defecates, when his blood is let. May he be cursed in all the members of his body. May he be cursed inside and outside, in his hair cursed, in his brain cursed, in his hair part cursed, in his temples cursed; in his forehead, in his ears, in his eyebrows, in his eyes, in his cheeks, in his chin, in his nostrils, in his incisors, in his molars, in his lips, in his gullet, in his wrists, in his arms, in his hands, in his fingers, in his breast, in his heart, in all his entrails down to his stomach, in his kidneys, in his flanks, in his thighs, in his genitals, in his hips, in his knees, in his legs, in his feet, in his ankles, in his toenails. May he be cursed in all the ligaments of his limbs, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet may there be no health in him. May Christ, the Son of the living God, with the whole power of his majesty curse him; may heaven rise up against him with all the might which it moves in order to damn him, if he does not do penance and give satisfaction. Amen, so may it be, so may it be. Amen."²

Doubtless the church teaching body had not only the right but also the duty to keep watch over the teaching of the faith. Of necessity it follows that this teaching body would dispute someone being a member of the communion of the faithful who had deviated from the basic issues of this teaching. To be more exact: the teaching body laid down that anyone who *obstinately*³ supported serious falsehoods, put himself outside the bounds of the church.

In our way of looking at the problem of religious freedom and freedom of conscience we must be aware that the further we go back into history, the more united is the power of the church, and the more intolerant her attitude becomes towards dissenters. This intolerance, to whose theological roots we will return, was first effective at the level of church teaching, which then formed the theoretical basis for the attempt at a practical enforcement of the claim for undivided allegiance.

Some historical examples enable us to illustrate this: the persecution of the Jews, the war against the Muslims and the ruthless elimination of dissenters.

The Persecution of the Jews

It is widely held that the antagonistic attitude of the Church towards the Jews can be traced back to the New Testament. Paul is predominantly referred to⁴ because he has often been accused of creating the theological basis of the Church's anti-Jewishness through his rejection of the (Jewish) "Laws" in favor of those of "Christ" (Gal 2.21) or, on another level, through the teaching of justification, not from the "Works" prescribed by the Law, but solely through "Faith" (Rom 3.27ff). But such accusations are devoid of any basis. They overlook the fact that Paul, although he repeatedly speaks of the "hardening" of Israel (compare amongst others Rom 10.2 ff; 18 ff), never excludes his people from messianic salvation — on the contrary, he is convinced that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11.26), and that the "hardening" of a *part* of Israel will only last "until the full number of the Gentiles come in and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11.25). Paul also develops the basic theories of his laws and teachings of justification (Gal 2.11-21) *not against the Jews* but against those fellow-Christians who hold the view that baptized gentiles should be circumcized and must live according to Jewish rule of law. It is a fact that Paul never uses the term "Jew" in an anti-Jewish sense.

This is less clear in St John's gospel, where the Jews are frequently referred to in a negative way. But only single representatives of the Jewish people are implied; the pharisees and high priests (compare Jn 7.13 with 7.32); the pharisees and teachers of the law (compare 9.18 with 9.13, 15, 16); the members of the Jewish central authorities (10. 31, 39); (these references only make sense when those who are here called "Jews" hold police authority); the opponents from the leading classes (19.15,38. 20.19); the holders of power who wanted to eliminate Jesus and for *this reason* are described as "the devil's sons" (compare 8.44 with 8.37, 40); the members of the Sanhedrin (that is, of the high council; 18.35). And finally, Jesus's sermon on "the bread from heaven" (6.22-59) does not deal with a repetition of an historical event, but reflects the inner religious situation at the time of the writing of the gospel. "The Jews" here do not represent the Jewish people but the opposing party, against whose too intellectualized interpretation the author had to defend the "real presence" (as we would say today) of Christ in the eucharistic bread. A thorough analysis of the concept "Jews" in the fourth gospel reveals that here the Jews are equated with

the ruling classes, and particularly with the members of the temple aristocracy. The Church has subsequently overlooked these facts and applied terms such as (God's) murderers (8.40) and "devil's sons" (8.44) to all Jews.

It was believed that the foundation and justification for this attitude could be traced back to another source, the so-called curse of the Jews upon themselves, which is only found in Matthew: "So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' Then all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children' " (Mt 27.24 ff). It is this statement that has made it possible for Christians over centuries to persecute the whole Jewish people as "God's murderers," and to qualify the injustice inflicted upon them as the punishment of God. Historically seen however, it is highly unlikely that Pilate, as the representative of the Roman state control, would present his judgement as judicial murder to a subject people. It is also unthinkable that all the Jews present in Jerusalem on the occasion of the Paschal feast, let alone "all the people" were gathered before Pilate. And how should this statement be understood, if not as an historical account?

Matthew's gospel was written after the Romans, in 70 AD, had caused a fearful blood bath in Palestine and destroyed Jerusalem. It is more than probable that the evangelist connects this national catastrophe with the rejection of Christ by the Jewish people. Accordingly, cursing themselves would not have been an historical event, but a theological interpretation of the destruction. In this connection Franz Mußner has observed: "No Christian can, with a clear conscience, call upon Mt 27.25 to justify his anti-Jewishness. If Jesus' blood is upon the children of Israel, it is upon them as the blood of the Redeemer."⁵

It is precisely this fact that Christianity has either not recognized at all or frequently overlooked — with the result that the Church has been an accomplice during the many centuries of the Jewish people's suffering. *An accomplice*; for it is known that there was a pre-Christian anti-Jewishness linked to the religious non-conformism of the Jews, which, of necessity, also made a political impact in, for example, the rejection of the cult of the gods and emperors. Incidentally, on this point the Christians of the first three hundred years do not differ from the Jews — that is why they were described as *átheoi* — godless. But Christianity had scarcely been declared the state religion of the Roman Em-

pire when those who had previously been persecuted themselves became persecutors. Through state and church laws (or, in view of the nascent alliance of the time between the throne and the altar, better expressed as state-ecclesiastical laws), the Jews became, in the course of time, practically without rights. On the one hand there were popes like Gregory I (the Great, 540-604 AD) who practised a moderate policy towards the Jews, but on the other hand, it is thought-provoking that the Arab conquest of Spain in 711 AD was looked upon by the Jews there as a liberation.

The first Christian emperors after Constantine had already subjected the Jews to legal restrictions. They were forbidden to keep Christian slaves or to enter into marriage with a Christian (Constantius, 339). In 404 AD Honorius excluded them from military service and Theodosius II from any kind of official position. Later they had to wear special dress. From the 11th century on they were forced into ghettos, a measure which the Third Lateran Council attempted to enforce permanently in 1179. The term ghetto, however, was first used in 1516, when the Jews of Venice — in that part of the city in which the new foundry, the ghetto nuovo, was located — were resettled. In 1248-50 when the bubonic plague was raging across wide areas of Europe, the Jews were accused of poisoning the wells. Added to this there were many rumors and calumnies, as groundless as they were persistent, which lasted for centuries: the Jews would violate crucifixes, desecrate hosts, slaughter Christian children for ritualistic purposes...

Such slanders cost countless Jews their lives. In passing it should be mentioned that even the Reformation did nothing to ameliorate the situation. Even if during his early years Luther disapproved of the previous treatment of the Jews ("that Christ was a Jew by birth"; 1523), twenty years later ("Of the Jews and their lies"; 1543), disappointed that the Jews refused to convert to Christianity, he demanded the destruction of their houses, the burning of synagogues, the confiscation of their sacred texts, and the forbidding of services under pain of death.

Although Humanism, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution introduced civil equality for the Jews, they were unable to overcome those anti-Jewish feelings which assumed such demonic proportions in the Holocaust of our century.

How was all this possible? This question does not interest us here from the historical, psychological, or sociological aspects — although

these are also of importance in our attitude towards the problem. How was all this possible in a society which had grown from the soil of Christianity? Hans Küng observes:

"We ask simply as Christians, as members of a community which — unlike God's people of old — calls itself God's new people. We cannot ask this question without being struck dumb with shame and guilt. Can we indeed still want to speak, when millions have been silenced? We attempted to argue *morally* in order to justify ourselves in shameful or shameless apologetic — ("the Jews have also made mistakes" — Certainly!) or *historically* ("one must understand everything in relation to the times" — Everything?) or *theologically* ("that was not really the True Church" — Who and where is this True Church?), or *politically* ("one has to weigh it up, it was more opportune to do nothing about it" — Was it also Christian, evangelical?). How far can such self-justification go, with such an immeasurable leaden weight of guilt? The Church preached love and sowed murderous hate, she heralded life and spread the bloodiest death. And this upon the very brothers of him from whom she had heard: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25.40). The Church stood between Israel and Jesus and hindered Israel from recognizing him as its Messiah."⁶

Of course this does not imply that the entire history of the sufferings of the Jewish people under the Nazis can be blamed on the Church. But this history of suffering is unthinkable without the prehistory of anti-Jewishness, which was not only tolerated, but also practised by the Church over the centuries.

In view of this fact, the Church has emphatically admitted her guilt in the Council's declaration on her relationship to non-Christian religions: "Conscious of the heritage which she has in common with the Jews, the Church, which condemns all persecutions against any people, laments, not for political reasons but from the impetus of the religious love of the gospels, all outbreaks of hatred, persecutions and manifestations of anti-Semitism, which have been directed at any time and by any one against the Jews." (No. 4)

The same statement also emphatically retracts the assertion which was widely used in sermons and catechesis over the centuries, that the

Jews are God's murderers and as such are cursed by him. "Although the Jewish authorities with their followers urged the death of Christ (Jn 19.6), one can neither lay the blame for the fact that he suffered upon all Jews alive at the time, nor indiscriminately upon Jews today. Certainly the Church is God's new people, but even so, the Jews may not be represented as being rejected or cursed by God as if this were according to the scriptures. Everybody should be responsible for seeing that no one in catechesis or in preaching the word of God should teach anything that is not in accordance with the truth of the evangelists and the spirit of Christ" (No. 4). It should also be remembered that as early as 1959 John XXIII had struck the intercession for "the perfidious Jews" (*pro perfidis Iudaeis*) out of the Good Friday liturgy because of its insulting nature.

Simultaneously the Council has taken thought of "the shared spiritual inheritance of both Jews and Christians" and means to "promote mutual knowledge and respect, which above all will be the fruit of biblical and theological studies as well as of brotherly discussion" (No. 4). Dialogue instead of polemic, rapprochement instead of ostracism, understanding instead of rejection — if this program is really followed through, then a new age of co-existence between Jews and Christians will have truly begun.⁷

Wars Against Those of Other Faiths

The countless persecutions of those of other faiths and the numerous wars waged against the "Unbelievers" — as the Muslims were termed from the Middle Ages to the age of Humanism — belong to the darkest chapters of church history. Generally the religious wars or wars of faith are known as crusades. But in the end this term implies nothing other than the spread of the faith by the sword. Originally the desire for conquest of the occidental states in the Orient played no significant role. What was decisive was the ideal of piety held by the orders of knights from the 10th to the 13th centuries. The old Germanic conception of fealty towards the sovereign ruler was applied to the "liege lord" Christ. It was necessary to defend his affairs and to assure them of victory. The contemporary poems of chivalry express this most clearly. Remember "Chanson de Roland," "Heliand" and Wolfram von Eschenbach's

"Parzival." The powerful attraction of this ideal of piety was even a surprise to Pope Urban II. When the Byzantine Emperor asked the former for help, and when in November 1095 at the Synod at Clermont in the Auvergne the Pope called upon the Christian world to free the Holy Sepulchre, the cry "Deus vult" (God wills it) rang out on every side. Within a year an army of about 30,000 strong was ready, and it advanced on Jerusalem by way of Constantinople, Asia Minor and Syria. In 1099 the city was taken—and a terrible bloodbath was ordered.

This event was typical of the entire movement of the crusades, which lasted until the end of the 13th century. The religious motives retreated gradually into the background; it became harder to see the spreading of the faith as the original motive. Flagrant material interests and political considerations determined these crusades perhaps not exclusively, but to a very large extent.

The writing of church history, prudently glossing over and harmonizing, has often tried to "explain away" the cruelties and atrocities practised by Christians as deriving from the Zeitgeist of the time, and thus to excuse them. This is not really possible because at least during phases which were progressive, the conviction was broadly held that one should not, at any price, spread faith in Christ by force. An example of this is Francis of Assisi, who in 1219, during the fifth crusade, forced his way unarmed into the middle of the Sultan's camp in Damietta, Upper Egypt, in order to preach the faith to him and to negotiate for peace. Naturally the Papal Delegate, Cardinal Pelagius Galvan, reacted most disapprovingly to this plan. For him the crusade was the carrying out of the divine will—he could appeal to the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) for confirmation of this. Francis however persisted in his plan, so that the Cardinal finally allowed him to seek out the Sultan in his army's camp. Although he was not converted the Sultan became his firm friend. The discrepancy between the action of the little son of an Assisi merchant and the pretensions of the Church could not have been greater: while the crusaders wanted to conquer a country, Francis tried to convert a people.

The concept of non-violent spread of the faith also came to fruition, even if in a totally misdirected way, in the Children's Crusade of 1212 when thousands of children from Germany and France set off, only to be sold finally into slavery or into brothels, if indeed they had not already succumbed to the exertions of the journey.

During the crusades it was not only the Muslims who were fought, but also heretical movements within the Church—that of the Albigensians for example. According to their teaching, the world was the work of evil. Only complete abstinence from worldly concerns could lead to salvation. This movement spread widely from the town of Albi (hence the name Albigensian) and was particularly strong in Southern France in the middle of the 12th century. Neither St Dominic nor the legates sent by Innocent III from 1198 on were able to achieve much. When one of these, Peter of Castelnau, was murdered in 1208, Innocent called for a crusade against the Albigensians. This war (1209-29) had devastating effects. The Albigensians were ruthlessly exterminated and the whole of Southern France was laid waste. Even with all justifiable criticism of the means used (would Jesus have used force against one of his followers, would he have actually murdered an opponent?) one must assume that the Pope meant only to guard the Church against false teaching.

During the Turkish Wars of the 15th century, however, although there was a religious motivation (as Pius II indicated in a public speech in 1452) there was as well a strong political interest at work. Its aim was to put a brake on the Ottomans' attempts at expansion. And since the Reformation, "religious wars" have hardly ever been determined by religious motives but by political ones (the Huguenot Wars, 1562-98; the Thirty Years War, 1618-48) in which political interests adopted a spiritual disguise.

Violence in spreading the faith can also be found at times in the field of the missions to the heathens, especially in Mexico, where in 1523 the Franciscans simply forbade the natives the worship of their gods; and in Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and in Portuguese Brazil, where at the beginning of the second half of the 16th century compulsory conversion and baptism were the order of the day.

In our time the temptation lies less in trying to force one's own religious ideas violently onto members of other religions than in the danger that one is blind to their spiritual values. For this reason, according to the Council, the church reminds "her sons" (where are the daughters?) "that with wisdom and love, through discussion and mutual work with those who profess other faiths—as well as through their own witness to the Christian faith and life—they must recognize, safeguard and encourage the spiritual and moral wealth and also the social and cultural worth that they find therein." (Nostra aetate, No. 2)

Repression of Dissenters

The insufferable intolerance that the church has displayed towards dissenters within her own ranks is almost greater than that shown towards members of other religions. We need to recall the bloody repression which was practised by the Inquisition (from the Latin *in-quiere*: to investigate, to inquire into), and also its pre- and post-history. The Inquisition, contrary to a widely held view, was not a medieval invention to combat heresy. It was first raised to a papal institution by Gregory IX in 1231, and in the following year it was extended over the whole Empire by the Emperor Frederick II. But its actual origins go back into early church history. At first, only spiritual disciplinary measures (banishment from the church community) were employed against heretics, and physical force was expressly rejected (for example by Tertullian and Origen), but this had undergone a change within the Church of the Empire since Constantine. Heretics were to be punished with confiscation of property and banishment, and occasionally they were condemned to death. In the middle of the 6th century, under the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, heresy was considered to be *lèse-majesté* in the sense that it was directed against the state religion, and so heretics, guilty of high treason, were burnt at the stake.

At the beginning of the 11th century this penalty was also decreed and rapidly carried through in the western world, in spite of initial protests from many theologians (among them Bernard of Clairvaux). As an enemy of the good of the community, the heretic had to be combatted by every available means. In view of the rapid spread of the Cathari and the Waldensians the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) threatened those princes who did not punish heretics with excommunication and the confiscation of their estates.

This then was the basis of the medieval Inquisition, the result of collaboration between Pope Gregory IX and the Emperor Frederick II. It obliged the state to track down heretics and those suspected of heresy. It was the task of the church to examine and judge them. The execution of judgement was delegated to the state. In itself, this Inquisition procedure was an advance in the administration of justice, in that a certain separation of powers was ensured: the state functioned as the prosecution, the church as judge. Also the inquisitorial or examining procedure aimed at a fair trial.

But this separation of powers was not to last. By 1231 inquisitors appointed by the pope (mostly Dominicans and Franciscans) were also zealous in the tracking down of heretics. Innocent IV was to sanction a development of the Inquisition, as frightful in its methods as it was disastrous in its consequences; in 1252 he approved the use of torture (which was to be enforced by the secular authorities) as a means of obtaining confessions. After their conviction the "guilty" were handed over to the "secular arm." The plea lodged to spare their lives can only be understood as the expression of an indescribable cynicism or as unparalleled naiveté. For he who did not enforce the death penalty came himself under suspicion of heresy.

Although Scandinavia, England and to a lesser extent Germany, were largely spared the Inquisition, its *modus operandi* influenced their witch hunts, particularly from the middle of the 15th until the end of the 17th centuries, and also had an effect on the "reformers" who approved the persecution of heretics. In Holland and France particularly, the Inquisition claimed thousands of victims. But it was to cause the worst havoc in Spain. Pope Paul III (who also summoned the Council of Trent) had to choose Spain, of all nations, as his model when he revived the Inquisition and placed it under a College of Cardinals, the future "Sanctum Officium Sanctissimae Inquisitionis" — an authority that now bears the harmless title of the Congregation of the Holy Office. The practice of the Inquisition was abolished in southern European countries in the first half of the 19th century (Spain and Portugal) and finally, in 1870, in the Papal States.

But the spirit of the Inquisition was to remain effective within the Church for much longer, in the sense that during the course of the religious crisis at the beginning of this century which has entered history under the term of Modernism, numerous theologians were not only condemned, but also punished by disciplinary measures without being given the chance to defend themselves or to have their petitions, which were in fact justified, taken up positively. Something similar was repeated at the beginning of the fifties with some representatives of the "Nouvelle Théologie" (H. de Lubac, M.D. Chenu, Y. Congar).

It should be remembered that according to the valid order of procedure today, (Nova agendi ratio, 1971)⁸, the Congregation of the Holy Office still has many arbitrary means at its disposal if it wishes to take action against an author. It is free to enforce an "extraordinary procedure" (No. 1) against him, by which the defendant only has one

chance to retract — and to take note of and take upon himself the ensuing disciplinary measures. Even the “order of procedure” (which is described as a “dialogue,” but whose consequences come near to that of a trial) grants the defendant no adequate protection, in that he is not entitled to the right to see the files, nor to seek the counsel of a specialist of his own choice during this “dialogue.” Appeal to a higher authority is also impossible (which must give rise to the thought that the Congregation of the Holy Office considers itself to be infallible), and so is a distribution of the functions of power: the charge, examination and judgement are each and all the business of the Congregation of the Holy Office. In the secular realm of civil rights, the word prejudice would be raised in describing such conditions. It seems that the Inquisition has had long lasting consequences reaching into our most recent history and indeed, into the present.

Looking back over the past, one must bear in mind that the history of heresy is also the history of the church’s blindness towards the signs of the time, and so also the history of those truths about which the church has so cautiously remained silent, as a result of a somewhat one-sided interpretation of the text on the innocence of doves and the wisdom of serpents (Mt 10.16), which were then brought up for discussion by the heretics, mostly in a one-sided and therefore distorted way. This fact should have led to an analysis of heresy, even if it had been in the form of an examination of conscience. Does not the Second Vatican Council teach that the Church, as the people of God, is at the mercy of sin during this earthly pilgrimage and therefore in constant need of renewal and conversion? (*Unitatis redintegratio*, No. 6). Also in its clarification of religious freedom the Council has expressly admitted the burden of guilt which the Church has placed herself under in her confrontation with dissenters: “It is certain that from time to time during the life of God’s people on their pilgrimage — through the changes of human history — a manner of behavior has occurred which corresponds little to the spirit of the gospel, has even been in opposition to it; but the teaching of the Church, that no one may be forced to believe, has nevertheless survived the times” (*Dignitatis humanae*, No. 12).

The Spiritual Assumptions of Intolerance

According to the Council, this “teaching constantly propagated by the (church) fathers is contained in God’s word” (No. 10). According to the Gospel of St John, the free decision is left to the discretion of the individual to “take offense” (Jn 6.66, 71), and to turn away from him (Jn 6.66, 71)⁹ — even if it be that one betrays him (Jn 13.27).

Just as one may not force anyone to the faith, according to the New Testament, one may also not hinder anyone from living according to his conscience. This is expressed in the answer which Peter and the apostles give to the council as a reply to their accusations. “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5.29). Paul also teaches the same when he refers to the Jewish diet regulations and emphasizes that everything that is done against conviction is a sin, and everything that stems from honest conviction is pleasing to God (Rom 14.23ff).

We have already pointed out that the Church, at least theoretically, was always aware of these things. Then how can it be explained that in practice this knowledge has often not been applied? The influence of St Augustine should not be underestimated. With many other church fathers¹⁰ he held the view that no one should be forcibly converted. But later in the struggle with the Donatists (followers of a special Church in the 4th century in North Africa named after Bishop Donatus of Carthage who demanded a strict church discipline) he abandoned this belief. In his “Retractions” he explains that he had rejected compulsory measures against the heretics out of pure ignorance of their misdeeds. He based his change of view on a biblical foundation, Lk 14.23; “Compel people to come in” (those invited to supper) and he did at least rule out the death sentence for heretics. As Bishop of Carthage he represented an indisputable authority for medieval theologians, and his intolerant attitude contributed greatly to the contemporary legislation against heretics.

Simultaneously the Church’s use of force against dissenters was the result of a belief rarely contested up to modern times, according to which spiritual values as such, that is, independent of the human beings who hold them, are founded in truth. Therefore it stands to reason that truth has every right to exist, whereas error has none. This implies that truth must be defended, error contested by every means available. The consequences that emerge from this for religious freedom are quite clear: he alone who professes the true faith, that is, the Catholic faith,

has the right to practise his faith. What happens then, when someone is convinced *in his conscience* that he must uphold another religion?

Thomas Aquinas made some basic considerations on this point in his short work "De veritate."¹¹ According to him, an individual is in duty bound to a sure conscience, even when he errs in good faith. Therefore he who follows his erring conscience does it with the desire to fulfill God's Will. Whatever is done against this desire is a sin, and therefore, the erring conscience must also be respected.¹²

How can one unite this hypothesis to the former, according to which error has absolutely no right to exist? Here Thomas is confronted with the problem of religious freedom. "May one tolerate the religion of the infidels?" (*infideles*: here he means the Jews and the heathens).¹³ Thomas resolves the question with the help of the theory of the weighing up of goods. One may condone a little evil in order to prevent great evil. A secular authority may therefore tolerate a certain evil, in order to avoid a great evil. For example, a state may tolerate some injustices from another state in order to avoid a disastrous war. On this point Thomas even has the New Testament on his side. In the parable of the weeds and the wheat (see Mt 13.24-30) Jesus reveals that God himself tolerates evil because through rooting it out, a greater good would be endangered. The goodness, which according to Thomas must be protected as far as the Jews are concerned, is the honor that the same God granted to them as to the Christians. Concerning the heathens, he remarks that some of them can be converted to the true faith in the course of time. In passing, it should be mentioned that this belief of Thomas's had scarcely any lasting influence on the Church's legal practices (the persecution of dissenters over the centuries).

Upon these assumptions—the sole right to the truth and consequently the exclusivity of the one true faith, a reluctant tolerance of error and so of non-Catholic confessions and non-Christian religions in order to avoid greater evil—rests the pre-conciliar teaching of the Church on religious freedom, as it was presented by Leo XIII in his encyclical "Immortale Dei" of 1855.¹⁴ The Pope was of the opinion that the true religion represented an indispensable element in public welfare. But conscience cannot benefit from error. Amongst other things, it is the duty of the state to protect and encourage the public welfare and therefore the true religion, and to prevent, if possible, the spread of other religions, as error has a damaging effect upon public welfare. A practical consequence of this opinion is that if the majority of a state is

Catholic, so must the state be "Catholic." This implies that one disputes the right of followers of another religion to profess their faith openly. If need be, one concedes that other confessions should be tolerated for the sake of public peace, that is, for a higher good. But in the case of a non-Catholic majority in a state, the Catholic minority, that is, the Church, must be granted complete freedom for the public profession of its religion.

From a contemporary viewpoint, this is certainly a distasteful outlook. But if we take the assumptions of thought into account which brought about this outlook, we cannot maintain that they are *only* an expression of arrogance and intolerance—although we would be within our rights to ask whether the Catholic Church could not have achieved more understanding somewhat earlier. In any case it is astonishing that the Church took so long to look with favor on human rights.

The Change

The Church has officially expressed her changed attitude towards the right to religious freedom in the Council's declaration of December 7, 1965, in which, amongst other things, it is said:

"The Vatican Council declares that man has the right to religious freedom. This freedom implies that he shall be freed from every compulsion, either from individuals or from groups within society or from any human force, to act against his own conscience: nor shall he be hindered from acting according to his conscience—within the recognized limits—either in private or in public, as an individual or in relation to others. Further the Council declares that the right to religious freedom itself is in truth based upon the dignity of the human being, and can itself be discerned in the revelation of the Word of God and in reason." (*Dignitatis humanae*, No. 2.)

Compared to earlier teaching pronouncements, this statement definitely signifies a kind of Copernican change. It came about on the strength of a consideration which had in no way been taken into account in the working out of the "traditional" teaching. This had been developed as a choice between Alternative Truth or Error. But it had been overlooked that values do not exist independently of human beings. It is always a *human person* who represents a conviction. Every

human being, however, possesses fundamental human rights which are not granted to him initially by an institution of society — for example by a state or a church — but are themselves rooted within the dignity of the human being. These rights, *already in existence*, must be protected by the state, by anchoring them in its constitution as civic rights. At the same time, however, the Council makes an important definition: the individual is not entitled to religious freedom in an unlimited sense, but only “within the recognized limits.” Another passage explains where these limits exist: an injustice occurs against the human being and against the order into which mankind is placed by God when anyone is denied the free practice of religion in society, “*provided that lawful public order is preserved*.” (No. 3; italics are mine). In other words, the boundaries of religious freedom (as indeed of freedom of conscience) are laid down here where the well-being of other human beings is at stake. It follows from this that religious freedom does not mean that every person can himself choose his faith according to his own discretion and whim, but that everyone must act according to his conscience for which before God he is responsible.

Man has not only the right, but the absolute duty to live according to his sure conscience. *Sure conscience*: this implies personal conviction, the subjective certainty to make a decision in this way and in no other. The sure conscience is *right* when it is in agreement with the objective norm. It is *erring* when a man departs from this norm in good faith. The fact of the erring conscience is a frequent occurrence in life. Naturally then, there is an obligation to pay constant attention to the education and training of the conscience. But as long as the individual does not detect an error, the sure (and in this case erring) conscience is the only moral authority that he has to obey. For, as Thomas has already taught, obedience to one's own conscience is the only chance one has to prove one's obedience toward God.

These considerations enabled the Council to reach the conclusion that a human being may not be prevented “from acting according to his conscience, especially in the realm of religion” (No. 3). A person's sure conscience must certainly be respected — provided that the welfare of others is not endangered. From this it follows that one must also treat the concrete behavior of those who think differently with respect, and concede them the right to practise their religion publicly:

“For the essence of religion exists in its realization and practice, above all in inward, deliberate and free acts through which man

disposes himself directly toward God; acts of this nature can neither be commanded nor prevented by pure human force. *However the social nature of man demands that he shall outwardly express his inner acts of religion*, that he will share religious matters jointly with others and acknowledge his religion publicly.” (No. 3; italics are mine).

Up to this point our explanations show that the attitude of the Church towards other religions has changed considerably during the centuries: the way leads from bitter contention to reluctant tolerance to open recognition. This move from hostile polemic to open dialogue is a proof that the Church is capable of change. It gives ground for hope that the last word has not yet been spoken, particularly about some of the affairs towards which the Church today takes a restrictive attitude.

What is generally considered valid for the relationships between religions also applies to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism and Islam: intolerant behavior provokes intolerance, the readiness for dialogue leads to dialogue. The dispute about Jesus is an impressive example of this. To the extent that Christians have made an effort to exchange opinions with Jews and Muslims they have found new access to the Man from Nazareth. We are not talking here about conversion to Christianity, but a turning towards Jesus.