

This book is designed to help those for whom church is neither sufficient nor engaging enough, covering various aspects of Christianity outside mainstream religion and church as well as introducing new ideas about Christianity and Judaism.

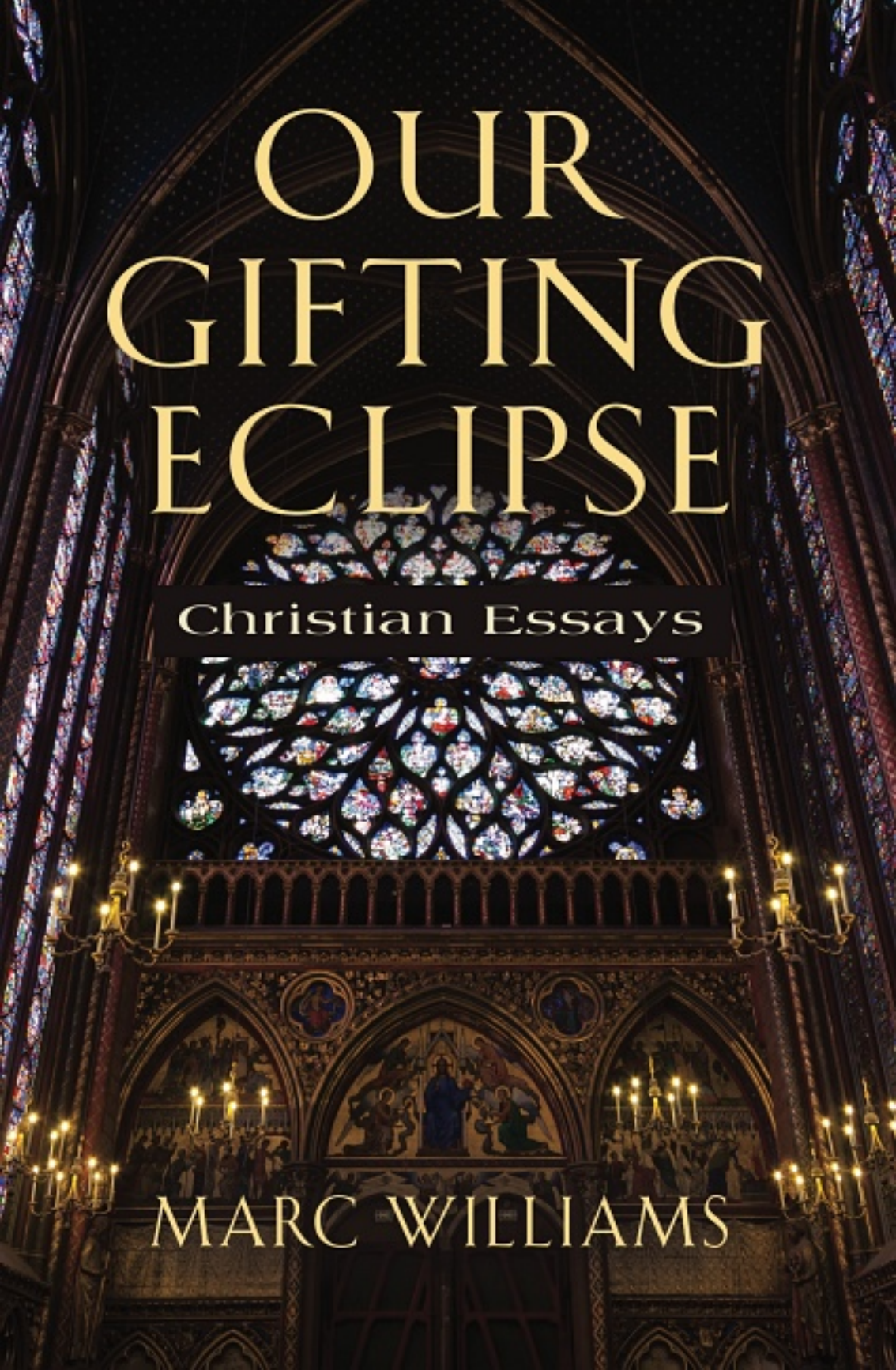
OUR GIFTING ECLIPSE: Christian Essays

By Marc Williams

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OUR GIFTING ECLIPSE

Christian Essays

MARC WILLIAMS

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WHAT IS SPIRITUAL INTROJECTION?

During a lengthy period of reading, listening to historical material about early Christianity on DVDs as well as my own thinking, I consider it seems that hardly anyone has ever clearly described or explained how we are to become spiritualized human beings. The Bible tends to describe this in examples of sudden transformation, such as through the miracles of Jesus. For most of us, however, the so-called “spiritual journey” tends to evolve more slowly and unsteadily, often taking years or even decades to mature into anything resembling a personal consistency between faith and action, introspection and charity or reconciling the Natural world with the divine realm of altered space and time, as described by those who have (usually unluckily) visited Heaven during near-death experiences. The Church, whether Catholic or Protestant (or Jewish, for that matter), tends to rely mostly on doctrines and worship services for this purpose, along with the occasionally inspired sermon. Few in the Church ever really ask: how do we help to make our parishioners more spiritual, less egocentric and capable of finding God in our lives during the other six days of the week?

I have become interested in the (pre-Catholic) history of early Christianity because I want to try to understand “what went wrong” after Jesus and Paul died, after the Gospels were written, when we no longer had any of “the originals” left to tell us about what actually happened during Jesus’ ministry. My bias about the Gospels is that they are stories formed to tell us about Jesus to show the range of His work on earth, but they can feel static, and it is too easy to reduce the Gospels to something akin to a textbook to be endlessly recited and studied over our lifetimes. They feel more like photographs than moving pictures, and I sense that “the real story” of Jesus was actually different and perhaps even more interesting than what we can only read of Him. What would the moment-to-moment, day-to-day life of His disciples

have been like, since we barely hear from most of them in the Gospels? It is clear that they struggled to understand Jesus, particularly His notion of “the Kingdom of God,” how they were to continue His work after His resurrection, and what was their evolving sense of God’s divine realm? If we assume that most of the disciples were largely illiterate, they could not even read the Old Testament (*Tanakh*), and so knew of their Judaism primarily through indoctrination from family and their synagogues. Jesus tried to pull them out of “what had always been,” though He was only partially successful until the disciples could witness His resurrection.

Judaism itself has been described as a “book religion,” though God is not a book, and He never had to write anything. I do not believe in the notion of Biblical inerrancy, so I don’t think we can absorb Him merely by reading endlessly. Jewish rituals and festivals, the 613 laws, circumcision and purification, the dietary laws and insular culture have served to form a sort of Jewish religious social psychology that said this is how we find God: through Scripture study, remaining obedient to the Law and keeping to ourselves. But the Old Testament frequently returns to Jewish disobedience toward God, including idolatry and wanton sinfulness. Multiple prophets railed against this, often to no avail. Many Jews today do not keep kosher laws, perhaps out of cultural weariness. Aspects of Judaism, particularly the prohibition on eating pork and shellfish along with circumcision, strike me as pagan, and not likely to lead to a genuine, fully-formed spiritual life. Judaism is too dependent on texts, rituals and history to ignite a broad-based, muscular spirituality that is not merely a reflection of their historical religious culture. Hence Jesus, whom they generally reject as a Messianic figure. Some early Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr, mocked the Jews’ religious preoccupations by calling them “superstitious.” What did God want the disciples of Jesus to do with His more radical message of nudging Judaism to nearly its breaking-point, which wound up getting most of them martyred?

The Catholic church replaces the 613 laws, circumcision and the dietary restrictions with its own more conceptual doctrines, honoring of Mary and their saints with a strong dose of discouraging sin through regular church attendance. I recently watched a video of a Latin Mass, which is highly prized by many in the Catholic church, and found it curious but rather hollow. It is highly choreographed for the clergy, interesting to watch (once in a while), but ultimately does not really qualify as a deeply spiritual experience for me. It is clear that there is great admiration for Judaism by Catholics, who see a kinship of rituals and immoral prohibitions indoctrinated through catechism in children. Like Judaism, Catholicism relies upon its history of practices more than any alembical challenges toward a personal spirituality. Certainly, there is a lengthy history of Catholic writers who looked deeply into Christian spirituality, but not in terms of any integration of individual psychology and spiritual transcendence that can be put into practice, with the possible exception of Mother Teresa. I am likely being unfair to both religions, but, from the outside, this is how they strike me.

Protestantism, as it has evolved, has lost focus and become too bland. It means too many things to different people, and the denominational strife over homosexuality in recent years highlights its inertia and intolerance. Seven years ago, I left the Presbyterian church because it has never really had much to offer me, it was what I was born into as a child. My problem was that I never had a satisfying church home, and so gave up trying to find one. God and Jesus, in contrast to the church, have always been more interesting. How do we become genuinely spiritual without the aid of non-viable churches?

*

It was in the 2nd Century CE that the early Christians began to try to make sense of what Jesus was all about. Their handicap was that, once the last of the Apostles and their followers died, there were no living brethren from whom to extract what made Jesus uniquely special in religious history. Although the Gospels were circulating and initial

attempts at forming a New Testament canon were being made, what began to take too much precedence was theology, and not just the Trinity. Early attempts at theological discourse can be seen in the Apostolic Fathers during the first half of the 2nd Century as the early, pre-Catholic church settled into its rhythm of establishing a permanent presence in religious society. Jesus could now only be conjured and contemplated, but never again could He be directly witnessed, and this loss has haunted Christianity ever since. In an earlier essay, I described how God's invisibility led to the development of theology in all religions, as it serves as the primary vexing point for how we are to understand Him. Theology began to replace experiences as the primary route to spiritual discipline and practice, salvation and redemption. One of the worst debates was over faith versus works, which began with Jesus' brother, James, and languished on until Martin Luther, who hardly resolved the matter, at least to my satisfaction. Theology is complex but easier than trying to harness the meaning of having witnessed Jesus, as had the disciples, who wound up writing so little compared to the many, many theologians who would follow them, until the present day. Theology is too much akin to philosophy: both can be purposeful, but both can too easily miss the mark. Theology's dominance in these early centuries became clotted enough for Constantine, as a newly-converted Christian, to gather the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE to try to settle a particular theological dispute, again with only partial success. Theology can be like wet soap in our hands: grasping it too tightly often leads to its slipping onto the shower floor.

We are thus caught in a permanent bind regarding Jesus and His disciples: we can read about them every day and year, we can contemplate them theologically, all the while too largely denied any certain historical clarity as to what they actually said and did on a daily basis. The Gospels are at best a storied approximation of what happened, a decent set of photographs but not a movie, certainly not videotape, and thus as frustrating as they certainly are "better than nothing." We are never sure what is fact, what is embellishment and

what is outright fabrication — yet this is our best source about Jesus and His disciples. No wonder people become discouraged. My own answer to this frustration (as I am studying John's Gospel at the moment, with the aid of priestly and scholarly guides) is to accept this situation as part of the larger set of unknowables: what does God look like, how was the universe actually created, and will there really be a Second Coming. Rather, I would like to attempt to take what we conjure and know to go somewhere else: toward a better sort of spiritual functioning than was described by more than a few Catholic sages over the centuries. We simply need something more, and perhaps something else.

Since none of us has divine abilities to affect others' health or any direct conversations with God, what does it really mean to become an "imitator of Christ?"

*

Introjection is a concept introduced by Sigmund Freud to describe how we are affected by the persistent influences of others, particularly our parents. Introjection illustrates how such influence becomes notable or even dominant in our own behavior. It is being influenced enough to enact an influence at least indirectly to reflect that influence. Although Freud talked about introjection mostly in interpersonal and especially familial terms, it can be seen in other ways. We all introject basic driving rules such as speed limits, stop signs and traffic signals. In a democracy, we vote for candidates who will hopefully reflect our political interests, since democracy is only a concept until it is enacted. Freud thought that parental influences served as the principal introjected material for children, whether positive or not. Children of alcoholics are a clear example of problematic introjection related to witnessing abusive parental drinking, often accompanied by lying and denial, auto accidents and impaired family functioning. This introjection can then be reflected in children's school functioning and life plans, choice of romantic partners and overall happiness.

Introjection becomes “what we carry around inside us” for even decades, which affects how we function as adults. People, whether they realize it or not, often go to psychotherapy to correctively deal with negative introjections. Freud saw this repeatedly with female patients in particular, who intuitively knew of this and would describe it in detail, most common in regard to their poor self-esteem. Introjection, whether for better or worse, is a naturally cumulative process which often leaves an indelible mark on people, sometimes for a lifetime.

Jesus’ disciples strived to introject His teachings, miracles and ways of relating to their fellow Jews, not by reading but by witnessing His ministry on a daily basis. He chose them because of sensing some sustainable introjective potential in these twelve men, who could later carry on His work on their own. The Gospels at times reflect His disciples’ struggle with introjecting Jesus’ words and actions, particularly their reflexive confusion over His miracles. In John’s Gospel, they are often confused by or misinterpret what Jesus tells them, and so He corrects them. Jesus offers His disciples a combined maternal and paternal positive introjection to further their own spiritual independence to do God’s work in the future after His resurrection and ascension. The eventual success of their introjection is seen in the likely martyrdom of at least some or most of the disciples. Jesus is gifting them something they could never receive otherwise: a direct linkage to God, unobtainable through only reading the *Tanakh* or obeying the Jewish Law. Such introjection would slowly and then more steadily ripple further over the next several centuries to propel Christianity into becoming the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. Introjection is a psychological process which can serve as the foundation for our own evolving spirituality, with God and Jesus leading the way.

While it is admirably necessary to indoctrinate children who attend church with the basic tenets of the Christian faith, this alone will generally prove insufficient to establish any deeper introjected spirituality by itself, beyond a simpler charitable orientation. Even the

complex rituals of Judaism are specific to its religious practices, and do not necessarily translate into anything to be used outside the synagogue or home, although Jews will likely disagree. Religion by itself, regardless of type, mainly orients us toward the divine realm and a charitably giving interpersonal stance to the world. But anyone can easily be completely disinterested in God, Jesus, Mohammed or Buddha. Rather, it is how any of these figures become spiritually vital that is of interest here. Religion and spirituality nests itself within our already established introjections by the time we are late teenagers or adults. Young people who attend evangelical churches, sometimes describing themselves as “on fire for God,” have introjected an at least rudimentary spirituality to serve others in some fashion, if mainly by spreading the good news of the Gospels. What has come to interest me as a starting place is when people take a suddenly strong interest in reading the Bible because of its distinct descriptions of how God affects His people in a certain place and period of time: namely Jews between ca. 1,500 BC and 90 CE, and what relevance this has for us in now the 21st Century. Book religions must become introjected and not merely discussed and memorized to be of real spiritual value. So how does that happen to some individuals, but so few of us collectively?

Spiritual introjections are both different from and more allusive than what Freud espoused, because, unlike having stop signs or parents to see on a daily basis, God is always invisible, and for us, Jesus is always only readable, or more beneficially to me, viewable in films. The basis for a fuller-voiced Christian faith has to deal with He who is unseeable who gifts us His Son, who is for us also unseeable. Mother Teresa said she heard Jesus talking to her on a train as a young nun, and this is what provoked her to begin her charity work — yet she did not claim to see Him. What can we more easily introject from the Gospel stories about Jesus as a starting place? I would say it is His being a medium for the divine realm, since without both His miracles and resurrection no one would consider Him memorably special. Miracles drew the crowds and His resurrection allowed for the spreading of the faith after His

ascension. No other person in the history of the world claimed to be resurrected and then appeared to people on earth afterward. Jews struggle to accept Jesus as their Messiah because crucifixion and resurrection were and are not part of the messianic story of their future. Beyond the parables and other teachings, the miracles and even His Transfiguration, what can be introjected most readily from the Gospels is Jesus serving as an intermediary between God and ourselves, which no other person has ever done. We introject His spiritual uniqueness first, that has to be of interest or nothing else happens. Atheists can not accept the existence of the divine realm because of their materialistically scientific orientation, and so become incapable of spiritual introjection. We Christians instead accept and gravitate toward the divine realm because God lives there, and our bias is that He created the universe nearly 14 billion years ago, probably through the Big Bang. The Natural world is all we see of God, that it belongs first to Him. That is why pantheism is so attractive, because God infuses Himself into our living visible world, which is where our spiritual introjection also begins and daily sustains itself.

If the Gospels render Jesus familiar to us and God is reflected in Nature, how then do we evolve toward what is called “faith in action?” Endlessly reading the Bible as a kind of perennial textbook to be swallowed whole usually does not, by itself, turn us into “imitators of Christ.” Jesus never told His disciples *Just read Scripture, just obey the Law*. He prodded them to go out into the world, first by twos and later in the Great Commission. Jesus gave no theological lectures or rehashed the finer points of the Torah. His efforts were for the disciples to introject all that they had heard and witnessed from Jesus to *go and do* for others. But this is how our spiritual introjections flounder: we study the Bible and read related books, go to Bible studies, maybe participate in occasional service projects or even try out mission trips, as some churches do emphasize service work. How does all of this settle and meld into spiritual discipline and service? How far can we nudge ourselves toward gaining faith in action? Why do a relative few

succeed in this effort, while many of us plod along and only favorably pretend to be functional Christians?

I answer this question with two more psychological terms: the familiar term *narcissism*, and a less-known word *resistance*. Simply put, narcissism denotes our variably intense self-centeredness which impedes our ability to care for and serve others. Narcissism also describes the limits of our abilities to understand what others are telling us. The disciple Peter sometimes blurts out responses to Jesus which reflect his understandably human perspective, which Jesus then has to correct. When Peter offers to die for Jesus, he is instead told he will deny knowing Jesus several times by the next morning. Such denial is, of course, self-serving in a time of great distress and uncertainty, with Peter correctly fearing that Jesus is about to die. Resistance is what it sounds like — an impaired desire to fraternize and aid unknown others, whether out of disinterest or fear of the unknown. We are often reluctant to help others out of “not wanting to get involved.” Narcissism stokes resistance, which results in spiritual inertia. I would say many Christians regularly experience such spiritual inertia, because we are not being pushed by others to grow and help, or resist such prodding. Our Christianity becomes easy and safe. It is what we do on Sundays, and the rest of the week “live our normal lives.” One of the Apostolic Fathers, Ignatius of Antioch, was seized by an intense desire for martyrdom, such was his zeal for Jesus, and this eventually occurred. He had been relieved of his narcissism and resistance toward God and Jesus, even though he never met Them. Some Christians are like this: like Ignatius, like Mother Teresa, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed during World War II for his faith. Such people are rare, and I am not one of them. I have never been visited by the Holy Spirit, and transformed into a disciple who fully trusts in God as to my life and fate. What are people like me and many other Christians to do about our too-shallow faith to try to live out Jesus’ conviction: *go and do*?

My answer so far is to both continue to circle around Jesus' basic stance of serving others when and where possible (akin to the old cliché about the moth and the flame) as well as search out some service activity to pursue on a longer-term basis, since I am retired. My introjection of God and Jesus seems to need some external push at this point to guide me deeper into any real spiritual service. I will continue studying and thinking, as always, since that has helped a lot since I left the church. Other people who have settled into service activities could also provide some guidance.

I close with the last lines of my new poem referencing this material:

You will say
it is not the creeds or minded doctrines,
not scratchy catechism or even sacraments
on chaster Sundays,
 but what gets best
-ly swallowed to walk us farther unto You,

our never-see-able phantasm of Creation
looming behind us to watch & daily wait
 to reveal Your divine surprises,
ineffably unspoken yet peculiarly true,
grains of the divine feasting our tongues.

October 2020

JUDAISM ECLIPSING UNTO JESUS CHRIST

Working from several of my previous essays, I want to try to encourage Judaism's practitioners to move beyond the static nature of their religion to embrace our rather obvious shared Messiah or *Mashiach*, Jesus Christ. From its beginnings, Christians have remained puzzled, resentful and, unfortunately, sometimes assaultive toward Jews for not "making the connection," but it was and is not so simple for them, who have been indoctrinated from the origins of Judaism to reject anyone who does not meet the requirements as outlined in their faith for such a divine presence. Thus, Judaism has stagnated over nearly 2,000 years, despite the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, which barely consider Jesus (*Yeshua*) at all, combined with the nay-saying about Him by Maimonides, their well-respected 12th Century rabbi. As I have mentioned before, too-few Jews have even read the New Testament, despite its being available (Jerome's Vulgate Bible, in Latin) since the 4th Century. Aside from my earlier brief review of the history of Judaism, I want to examine both its social psychology as well as what has to occur within this realm for the acceptance of Jesus to be better received, since it is not mere religion that holds them back. Having looked at Messianic Judaism as a recent development in this vein, I am concerned that this "sect" will not grow fast enough over time to persuade a sufficient number of Jews to accept Jesus, so that they will remain a spiritually languishing people perpetually searching for the true purpose of their particular faith. In other words, I almost feel sorry for them for whom they are missing. While Jeremiah called his brethren "*stupid children*" (4:22) for their tendency to engage in idol worship, this "stupidity" runs deeper than mere name-calling will fix. As Freud often said, we must deal with Jews' *resistance* to even look beyond what they know, which has become mere religion for its own sake. There was and is too strong a pagan tendency in Judaism, which gets in the way of seeking a Messiah more seriously. If Christians are grafted to the Jews' olive tree, can Jews eventually become grafted onto our *Mashiach*, seemingly before the end of time? It is true that many Christians simply do not know what to do with Jews, despite God's intent for us all to "swim in His

river.” Christian pilgrims visit Israel every year, to the extent that Jerusalem depends on tourist revenue, though such money “has not talked enough.” American evangelicals might mutter “Can’t they be saved,” to which I answer, *still not yet*. Underneath Christian indifference to Jews can easily found the question: “What will it take?”

Every religion tries to deal with this same overarching central “problem”: what to do about God’s increate invisibility, as we all know that we will likely never see Him, even in Heaven. His famous white light, which ushers us toward His divine majesty in a realm beyond the simpler ease of our many speculative theologies and comparatively comical creeds and rituals, may be as close as we ever get from this side of the too-rarely bridgeable chasm between the human and the divine. Judaism, like any other religion, was developed by human beings, with our unmatched potential to guess at least half-wrongly about what God is like and how He might deal with us. Jews do know they were singularly chosen by God because He saw in them a surprising capacity to become monotheistically devoted to Him out of a cultural panoply of polytheistic gods, most of whom were notoriously fickle and hard to please for the simplest of things. God’s covenant with Abraham and Moses, as described in the *Tanakh*, is a sometimes heroic story suggesting that they indeed were capable of remaining faithful to an unseen and untouchable being, despite their waywardness and corruption. For me, that is the greatest enduring strength of Judaism: that God did and does brand them as His chosen people for the purpose of that certain day granting them the brash favor of a humanly-lived *Mashiach* as His representative among us, and that He will not abandon them despite their many centuries of “stiff-necked” rebellion, idol worship and nearly incorrigible ability to misunderstand Him, having been gifted the only man-god ever born: Jesus Christ.

*

First, a bit different version of the history of Judaism than I described in a previous essay. The Jewish customs and rituals which I will examine shortly were developed over a long span of time to coax forth their single-minded spiritual posture of devotion unto God with the

intent of trying to pull Him inside them to improve their moral lives, which Freud called *introjection*. This occurs when a person(s) or idea(s) are internalized to such a refined degree that our behavior readily reflects such influence(s). Culture itself is readily introjected to form social psychology, which, in Judaism, has generally taken the form of *us versus them*. Jews believe that God belongs to them, and the rest of us “borrow” Him for our own paler usage, because they are His chosen people. Most of us are rudimentarily familiar with basic Jewish rituals and practices: the Tabernacle in the desert and the later two Temples, animal sacrifices, dietary laws restricting what can be eaten, encouragement to almost obsessively (re-)read the *Tanakh*, and their three major annual festivals: Passover (*Pesach*), Pentecost (*Shavuot*) and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). All of this forms a “spiritual bubble” in which Jews live to devote themselves to God through practicing their faith in this manner, and such, for too many Jews, this is enough. If they were asked about something like “the white light of Heaven,” they would perhaps know of it, but it does not figure into their way-of-being. Judaism is a self-referential, even solipsistic system of beliefs and practices which remains stubbornly insular and so nearly indestructible. It preserves itself through a time-honored tradition, which only rarely gets challenged or disturbed, as when Jesus bristled at its limitations and was later harshly disparaged for doing so. The Temple served as a sort of religious clearing-house for all things Jewish, with its pilgrimages, baths for ritual purity and gold-plated milieu. The first Temple was built by Solomon in the 10th Century BCE, the second after the end of the Babylonian Exile in the 6th Century BCE. No attempt has been made to reconstruct a third Temple since it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, and later I will answer why. Note that the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, as detailed descriptions of the Jewish way of life, can not be taken from them. Judaism, after the Temples were destroyed, became a “book religion,” with all the rigidities and disdain this implies.

Second, what these rituals and practices in Judaism mean from an outsider's perspective, and how they continue to hold the Jews back from God. Jeremiah and other Old Testament prophets lamented and shamed their brethren over indulging in idol worship, even while Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God. In fairness, they had been wandering in the desert for a long time, and could not have known what he was bringing them from the mountaintop. As I have discussed Jewish idol worship before, I will only say here that this was a necessary stepping-stone on their journey toward a working monotheism, which took centuries to be released into practice, since *no one sees God*. It is hard to maintain religious devotion on a daily or yearly basis without some tangible reward, so I do not fault them so much for their entrenched idol worship. The cute little statues, such as for *Baal*, do look a bit silly, though. The Temple itself became a sort of stone-and-gold idol where certain things predictably happened which illustrated what Judaism thought God was doing in their favor. In the Temple's Holy of Holies, its innermost sanctuary, was the Ark of the Covenant, made from acacia wood and plated in gold. Only the high priest saw the Ark once a year, hence, when it was lost or destroyed after the second Temple was ruined in 586 BCE, the Jewish populace had never seen it, yet God "lived there." The Ark was a beautifully-crafted idol which had previously been carried into battle and was deemed to have special powers, and yet, when it was gone, God had not abandoned the Jewish people. Their dietary laws serve the function of pantheistic infusion of at least religion into inanimate foods to suggest that what we do or don't eat positively or adversely affects our spirituality, rather than merely sustains us biologically. When I eat pork or lobster, then not only have I sinned, but I also risk being cursed by God for blatantly disobeying Jewish Law for my own pleasure. This reminds us of Catholic transubstantiation during the Eucharist in Mass, when bread and wine supposedly become the literal body and blood of Jesus, although He never intended such a concretized interpretation to His disciples before

being crucified. Circumcision, a covenant practice in Judaism, provides no real spiritual blessings for millions of male Christians. When I said earlier that Judaism can be overly pagan, this is what I mean. God is neither food or idols, He is not creeds or the Law, as He is the Creator of the universe. Let us always know the difference.

Third, there is psychological identity: one of the most important, steadfast qualities of our human functioning. Identity is both personal and familial as well as social and national. It cohesively binds us to our loved ones, our neighbors and countrymen, our sports teams, our politics and our religion (especially atheism, the most parasitic religion). Whether religious or not, Jews are an ethnic group with a shared cultural history dating back at least 3,500 years, along with familial, social and religious customs within a smaller geographical region. There are some 16-18 million Jews in our world of over eight billion people, and most of them live either in Israel or the United States. The history of their being persecuted by various groups is well-known, most egregiously by Christians, in terms of the sheer number of Jewish lives lost. Their hyper-sensitivity to insult and potential threats is also well-known, and, while understandable, cuts both ways. It is both protective of Jewish history and culture, but tends too often to be intolerant of new ideas out of their fear of again being subjugated by “foreigners,” especially Gentiles. Traditional Jews attack their Messianic brethren in Israel for the nauseating proposition that Jesus is indeed their shared *Mashiach*, and have taken legal action to try to prevent the Messianic message from being heard there. How do we know that the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus as described in the Gospels? Because traditional Jews today coerce their own ethnic brethren not to break ranks with them, as families in Israel disown their grown children for becoming believers in Jesus Christ. It is again the anguished cry of “Blasphemy!” My problem as a Gentile outsider with all of this is that it has little to do with God, as He cares about our religious preferences only so much — that we believe in Him, and do His work in this world. The thorny history of Jewish persecution can

not be used as a perpetual excuse to avoid considering the obvious: that Jesus is the son of God. Judaism has, for 2,000 years, really travelled nowhere in any significant direction. It has wandered in circles for well longer than for forty years in the desert, and so strangely, Jesus has watched His fellow Jews do this wandering while He stands just out of sight, vexing and sighing, *every day*. Any Second Coming awaits their devoted participation with Him — not just studying the *Tanakh*, engaging in religious practices or assuring continued orthodoxy. Jews have always belonged to Him since the days of miracles in Galilee and Jerusalem, and when Mary Magdalene found Him alive outside the tomb. It is God whom they must seek, and not merely themselves.

*

If not the ancient Temples or the Ark of the Covenant, if not the dietary laws or animal sacrifices, the annual festivals or other rituals of Jewish life, then what of Judaism is left that maintains a real covenant with God? The answer lies in the difference between *what* and *whom*, between what can be eaten or read against who could be witnessed as surely more divine than any of the rest of us. It is the difference between a baby's pacifier and their mother, between an object and a person: that is the answer to this languishing Jewish dilemma as to the real purpose of their religion. Jews are very proficient at maintaining a religion, but any sense of the divine realm was and is only rarely considered, which is true of most religions. Christianity itself has also struggled with this, but at least we have a diviner figure upon whom to spiritually gaze. Catholicism borrowed Judaism's love of endless arguing about dogmas and heresies, which to a great degree, tainted its usefulness after the Council of Nicaea in the early 4th Century. Constantine thought God and Jesus could be decided upon by a group of several hundred clergymen, and so the matter would finally be settled after two hundred years of bickering amongst theologians. He was wrong, since it was and is never settled well enough for our collective liking. Messianic Judaism is now a heresy in Israel, though it probably will not be

banished like so many dismissed Christian sects. So what would it take for more if not most Jews in Israel and America to accept Jesus as their *Mashiach*?

What verses *whom*. Religion verses spirituality, which sounds a bit strange, since doesn't religion lead to spirituality? Not necessarily. In American polling on religion, the current slogan tends to be "I'm spiritual, but not religious." I take this to mean such people have given up on church, but still believe in God, which, if true, would include me. Remember I mentioned the Freudian concept of therapeutic resistance, which is what it sounds like: an entrenched defensiveness about the patient's personal situation and why they might fear changing. We are all resistant about things in one way or another. I am not especially keen to learn how to use a smart phone, for example. I don't think we start with lending Scripture to people who are hesitant or resistant to hearing about Jesus. I myself don't like evangelicals spouting "Bible stuff" to me when I pass by them in public, as it is annoyingly presumptuous. We start with the resistible question: "What do you know about Jesus?" and then listen for how negative their reaction(s) are. The initial goal would be for traditional Jews to eventually say "I don't know much about Him," which, curiously, would be the best answer, because "I don't know" can become "I am surprised that He is not only whom I had heard about," implying animosity. The issue of *what* verses *whom* is broached as can traditional Jews not exactly set aside their bias against Jesus (no, certainly not initially), but can they even entertain any discussion at all that is not dismissively punitive? The social psychology of Judaism tends to be to dismiss what falls outside common knowledge and practice, and some aspects of cult psychology are present. Telling such Jews to go home and read the Gospels would likely be asking too much, too soon. They will say He does not matter — so what would matter to them?

We could ask them "What is the purpose of Judaism for God?" They would recite the *Shema*, reflecting the historic Jewish covenant with

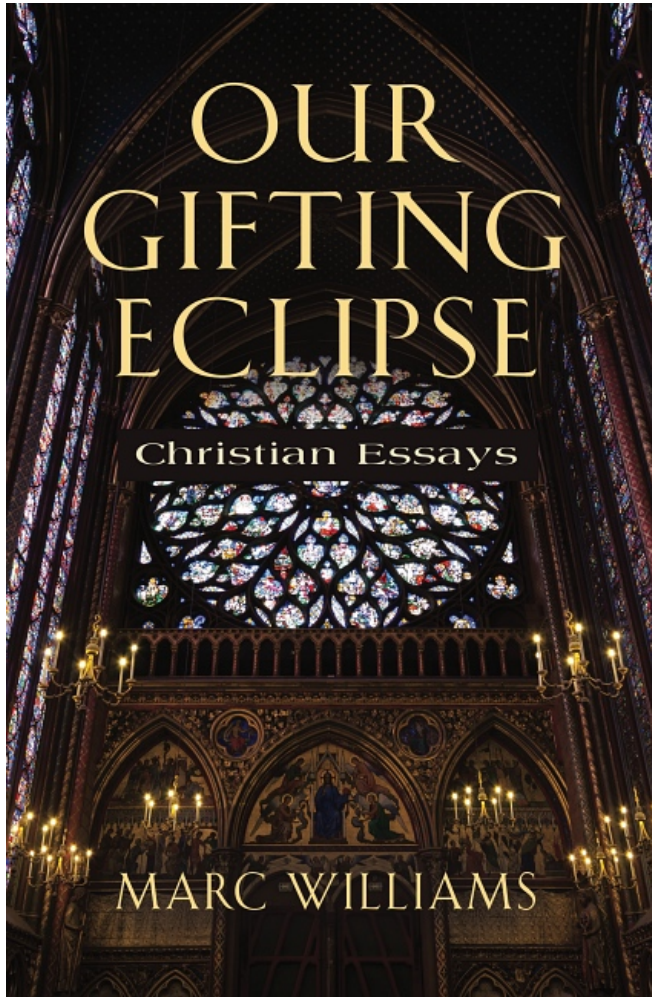
God from Mount Sinai, into which we slip a slight complication: “Jesus is God’s human reflection of the Shema’s covenant, He is part of the oneness of God for the Jews.” They would vigorously shake their heads, to which we answer “Did not Jesus perform miracles, and how would He do so without authority from God.” The wonderful line from John 9:32, out of the mouths of the Pharisees, then gets quoted: “*If this man were not from God, He could not do anything.*” We have to nudge them toward the outskirts of Judaism to say “What you have is not enough, it is not spiritual enough, and knows too little about the divine realm.” We ask them about who God is, saying “Try to answer the question without merely referring to the tenets of Judaism.” Jesus constantly nudges His disciples and fellow Jews to the edges of what they know, and then says, in effect, “Keep going.” Most Jews will have little tolerance for all of this, and it is best not to waste time with unreceptive people. I frankly don’t know that such “conversion” unto Jesus is even possible in Israel on a large scale within, say, twenty years, since their social psychology is so ingrained. Making the Gospels out to be a palatable source of spiritual curiosity could help, such as through YouTube videos. The least familiar option would be to expose traditional Jews to the Shroud of Turin (about which they generally know little), but this requires specialized knowledge, and may not be easily understood.

In regard to what scholars have called replacement theology or supersessionism, Jesus offers no real theology to replace the rituals and practices of Judaism, but by “fulfilling the Law,” He transcends its rigid limitations through providing Himself as a direct linkage to God to straddle the chasm between the human and the divine. He is the *who* eclipsing the *what* to gift us Himself as the One who gets baptized in the Jordan River to gain divine status for our benefit. We can tell recalcitrant Jews that He is the path their religion takes to be offered any real sense of what God is all about, that any religion must be subservient to the divine realm, since we did not create ourselves. To use the familiar analogy, Christianity is the snake shedding the skin of

limitations Judaism has shackled itself with to be any less dogmatically burdened with the *what* over the *whom*, though it is far from perfect. As I write this, the Methodist church is likely going to splinter over the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, as though any church can actually affect anyone's sexual orientation. Protestants gave up five of the seven Catholic sacraments, but how much better are we for doing so? No religion, by itself, is ever enough, since, in our case, we can "see" the elephant we are all talking about amongst ourselves, yet it remains invisible.

John's Gospel (which, for me, is the greatest of all Scripture) was written late in the 1st Century CE against the backdrop of the first Jewish Christians being banished from synagogues for accepting Jesus Christ as their *Mashiach*. John was the only disciple still alive, but once he was gone, the theological arguments would ensue because there were no more witnesses to Jesus' ministry, and so it has been since then. It was really theology that nearly "replaced" Jesus, not Christianity replacing Judaism. His new covenant melded into the old one as a continuous movement toward God in predicting the loss of the second Temple, and with it the animal sacrifices that would never return. The *whom* had finally replaced the *what* — hence, no third Temple. The schism between Judaism and early Christianity was inevitable for this same reason: there was no Jesus in traditional Judaism, so, for the Christians, it was not enough. The Bible was never enough, and no religion is ever enough. Only Jesus was humanly enough, and only our ever-invisible God is enough. All the books and all the dogmas are left behind should we reach Heaven, and there we shall be blessed with our Lord, who bathes everyone in radiant love — Jews *and* Gentiles — at last.

May 2022



This book is designed to help those for whom church is neither sufficient nor engaging enough, covering various aspects of Christianity outside mainstream religion and church as well as introducing new ideas about Christianity and Judaism.

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