

Hebrew roots of the Christian Faith

by

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Introduction

The New Testament was written in Greek. A type of Greek called Koiné. It was everyday language, used everywhere in the Roman Empire. It can be compared to English of the newspapers of today.

Why in Greek? It was the universal language of the time. It had become so after that Alexander the Great had conquered almost all the known world. Though his empire collapsed after his death, the cultural influence of Greece – language and thought – would still be predominant for centuries. It is, in a certain sense, even to this day.

At the end of the gospel of Matthew 28:19 we read: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Later Peter would be called personally to first proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, as we read in Acts 10. Though Paul was the one appointed apostle to the Gentiles.

So, with this in mind, the most natural thing we could expect to happen, was that the New Testament was written in a language understood by the Gentiles of the time.

But the Hebrew roots of the Christian faith were not denied and cannot be denied. Hebrew was the background of all the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. Hebrew was their native language. Hebrew was their culture, their faith, their mind. That all these factors are still visible even when they used a foreign language, the Greek, to write their memories and teachings, was inevitable.

Some may tend to deny or ignore the Jewish background of the New Testament. Marcion was an heretic of the second century who accepted as Scripture only the writings of Luke and Paul. He believed the God of the Old Testament to be in opposition to the God of the New.

On the other side, I have read some extreme comments as if the Christian Faith and the translation in our western tongues of the truths of the Jewish Faith and even of the primitive church and its Hebrew roots, has somewhat lost the original Jewish spirit in it.

Concerning this latter tendency, I believe some problems of translation and of adaptation of one culture when communicated to another, have been overestimated. The true essence of our faith and its Jewish origin are alive and well in our Bibles today! They have influenced us and changed the non-Jewish Christian converts and not vice versa.

We end all our prayers with a Hebrew word, Amen. We shout to God Hallelujah. We call Jesus the Messiah – from the Hebrew word – with the same idea in mind as when we call him Christ – from the Greek – and the latter word has entirely taken the meaning of the Hebrew term. More details will be given in the following pages.

The study of the Hebrew background I am sure, will unlock some Scripture truths and I am sure will bless the reader with a more reverent attitude concerning the Jewish heritage of our faith.

Chapter One

Was the New Testament written in Hebrew?

Until 1947 such a question could not be asked. It was a common belief that Aramaic was spoken in Israel during the days of Jesus. The Qumran discoveries have proven the case for the Hebrew language.

Aramaic was an international language that Israel entered in contact with most during the time of the Babylonian and Persian domination – 605 BC. to 536 BC and on. Some portions of the Old Testament were written in that tongue. Parts of Daniel, Esdra, a verse of Jeremiah. The intent of such use was to make those portions of Scripture universal, since Aramaic was spoken everywhere in the world. In Daniel, the book introduces the beginning of the Aramaic text openly: “Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation.” Daniel 2:4. From that moment on till all of chapter 6, the book was written in that language. It is hard to resist the conviction that the author did so purposely, because he wanted the message of those portions of his book to be universal.

This is why sometimes we hear of an Aramaic original gospel of Matthew in some quarters or out of date publications. The fact remains, as witnessed to by the famous church historian Eusebius Pamphilus, bishop of Cesarea, in Palestine, early in the fourth century. He writes in his Ecclesiastical History, “Matthew also having first proclaimed the gospel in Hebrew, when on the point of going also to other nations, committed it to writing in his native tongue, and thus supplied the want of his presence to them, by his writing.” Book I, chapter XXIV.

It is beyond the shadow of a doubt that everything in the gospel of Matthew that we know, through the manuscript evidence, is Hebrew except the language. If there was ever an original Hebrew Matthew, only a Greek translation was handed down to us and so it is safe to rest with what we have.

Recently the theory of a Hebrew Mark has been supported by some scholars. No historical tradition can we recall in favour of such an idea. Again Mark too has arrived at us only in Greek. And if the identification of 7Q5 as a fragment of the gospel of Mark is correct, the idea of Mark being originally written in Hebrew and then being translated in the Greek text we know, becomes less probable.

There is no reason not to believe what Luke writes at the beginning of his gospel: “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,” Luke 1:1-3.

Luke speaks of others writing about the things of the Christian faith. As a perfect Greek mind at work, he reassures the reader that before writing he did his proper research to be sure of the reliability of the information he was going to provide his reader with.

The evidence of the accuracy of his research is proven by the fact that his narrative has more Semitisms and shows more dependence on original Hebrew documents than Matthew and Mark, incredible as it may seem.

Some critics believe the epistle to the Hebrews to have been originally written in Hebrew. Some believe the translation of it into Greek was performed by Luke, though we have no certainty that he knew the Hebrew language at all.

Again only the Greek of this epistle survives.

It is impossible to speculate on the possibility of an original Hebrew gospel now lost or survived only in a Greek translation or visible through the skill of Semitic languages specialists under the cover of the Greek text handed down to us. Though I appreciate the work of those who try to learn more about the origin of the New Testament, resting on evidence only, we can speak only of a New Testament all written in Greek, that received universal sanction by the church throughout the world and that has been recognized as the inspired Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, to be read and added to the Old Testament, the Hebrew Tanakh, hand down the Bible as we know it to the man of the 21st century.

Chapter Two

Hebrew background of the New Testament

As I said earlier, the original language of the New Testament may be Greek, but the thoughts behind it, the background, the places, the culture, the whole picture is Hebrew.

Jesus said it openly, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.” Matthew 5:17.

The least we can expect is a Hebrew background in the Gospels and the entire New Testament.

During his speeches Jesus was addressing Jews in their native tongue. It is evident that the evangelists, translating his sayings in Greek, must have found some difficulties. They could not entirely and perfectly translate any language into another and so the Hebrew atmosphere is so evident and predominant. The Greek language was only a means of rendering Hebrew thoughts and culture accessible to the Gentile world.

Very often today’s preachers simply explain and translate the words of the Bible in terms of our everyday life. Since most of us live in big western cities, now, at the beginning of the 21st century, we could not be any farther from the agricultural and pastoral world of a small Eastern Roman Province, whose only peculiarity was the immovable faith of its inhabitants in their national God.

Let us consider some examples. They are so interesting.

Luke 1:34

“Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

The word here usually translated “know”, literally translates the Greek original. But both in that and our western languages, the words of Mary taken for what they are, literally, do not mean much.

This is a clear example of a Hebrew thought expressed in Greek words. If we translate the thought the word “know” implies in the Semitic world, we should translate Mary’s words like: “seeing I have not had any sexual intercourse with any man.”

This Bible expression is so familiar with the Christian readers of the Bible, that we can say easily, and we will repeat it and prove it later, that the influence of the Semitic mind has been so strong on our culture that it has enriched the meaning of our words, amplifying them according to the religious terminology of the Bible.

John 2:1

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee.”

The apostle gives us here a clear indication of when the marriage took place. It was a Tuesday! Marriage in Israel were common to take place on a Tuesday. This tradition is related to the two times God called his creation good in Genesis 1:10-12, where the two good things would be the woman for the man and the man for the woman.

Sunday is the first day of the week. We owe this to the Hebrew calendar.

In Mark 16:9 we read, “Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week.” It was Easter Sunday!

Luke 9:51

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, **he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.**”

We understand the meaning of the words by the context, but it is so obvious that the expression is idiomatic and belonging to the Semitic frame of mind.

As we said earlier, Luke promised his readers to search historically accurate documents. He kept his promise, I am sure, and was so reverent towards the documents he found or reports he heard that he translated or proposed in Greek the closest reconstruction to the Hebrew possible.

Luke 11:50-51

“That the blood of the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.”

There is something in such a statement that only the Jewish background can explain. Chronologically speaking, the above statement is not correct. Abel was indeed the first man to be murdered but Zacharias was not.

So why did Jesus say so?

He was speaking to people who had in mind the Jewish canon of Scripture. The murder of Zacharias was found in the last book of the Old Testament, according to the Palestinian Canon, the book of Chronicles. So Jesus' words must have sounded in the ears of his listeners like our expression of today: “from Genesis to the Revelation.”

Instances like this should warn us against those who sometimes too quickly speak of contradictions in the Bible. Very often alleged mistakes in the Bible are only thought to be so because of lack of knowledge of circumstances, languages, culture, history and background.

Mark 4:41

“And they feared exceedingly...”

Here the King James did not translate the Greek literally. On the contrary, the Greek translated the Hebrew here literally. It says: “they feared a great fear”. I understand how strange in our language it sounds.

In **Matthew 2:10** we find a similar construction that the KJV has translated more literally: “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”

The Semitic influence is unquestionable here.

I remember when I was just a kid I was so in love with the Bible – I still am, to be honest. One time during a class work in my native language, Italian, I used a phrase like “they wondered with great wonder.” But my teacher knew nothing of Semitisms and so she marked that with confidence as a mistake. To be honest, I did not know of such a thing at the time too!

This to say that, whether we admit that or not, we know it or not, the Hebrew background of our faith is so strong that it easily influences our frame of mind and our language even if between an original Hebrew statement are first a Greek and then an English translation - Italian, in my case.

Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes tasteless, with what shall it be salted? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and to be trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world."

Jesus speaks of salt and light.

Salt was so precious in times past. So precious that it was used even as a means of payment – hence the word *salary*. Today we have electric refrigerators, so it is not our fault if we fail to see the importance of salt, used also as a preservative.

The same applies to the analogy of light. In a world so used to electricity, night is not able to stop us from doing things, working, going out, etc. But try to imagine how precious it was for the men of the times of Jesus.

So important were Christians for the world!

Mark 1

I have always been surprised by the way the way Mark begins his gospel. I always preferred reading Matthew or Luke instead of Mark, which I only considered a shorter version, even a summary of the two.

Jean Carmignac who is an authority on the Qumran texts. Those writings that are contemporary to the Gospels. This scholar commentating on Mark's prologue that

seemed so strange to me, says that it perfectly aligns with the literary style of the time when it was written.

Very often people see contradictions, imperfections, defects in the Bible. Most of the time such alleged mistakes are only in the mind of the reader, not entirely informed.

Reading Mark in Greek, I discovered how peculiar this gospel is, how deep and precious this writing is for the Christian faith.

Please notice in the following Bible passages how the word “son, child, children” is used in a way that has no parallel in our languages, nor in the Greek language. The meaning is evident.

Matthew 13:38

“The field is the world; the good seed are **the children of the kingdom**; but the tares are **the children of the wicked one**;”

Matthew 23:15

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more **the child of hell** than yourselves.”

Luke 20:36

“Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being **the children of the resurrection**.”

John 17:12

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but **the son of perdition**; that the scripture might be fulfilled.”

2Thessalonians 2:3

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, **the son of perdition**;”

Notice here how Jesus calls Judas “the son of perdition.” The same expression Paul will use for the Anti-Christ. The strange and unexplainable modern tendency to review the person of Judah in a positive way, has no place whatsoever in the New Testament. The so called gospel of Judah is only a mystification, a false document, whose only value is in the age of the papyrus manuscript witnessing to its existence in times past.

1Thessalonians 5:5

“Ye are all **the children of light**, and **the children of the day**: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.”

I like the King James Version because it is a literal translation. It is the same method sanctioned by the New Testament writers who, translating literally from the Hebrew expressions, let the Jewish background arrive at us, with all the riches and beauty it possesses.

When a translator is working of the translation of passages like the above finds himself confronting a dilemma. Will he betray the original language and use the so called dynamic equivalence method and in the new language the meaning of the phrase but not the phrase itself? Or shall he forget how meaningful will the phrase be if it is rendered literally?

Literal translations are more to be valued for study purposes. Dynamic equivalence makes it easier to read the text as you would read a novel or a story. The latter relies on the capability of exactly understanding the meaning of the passage. It is not always so easy. I prefer literal translations. I want to know what the original text said.

Luke 8:5

“A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”

Luke 22:15

“And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer:”

Such constructions is Semitic. The translation here is literal. The KJV has influenced the English speaking world that it was no surprise when I heard Bob Dylan sing: “I dreamed a dream.”

The Greeks looked at the New Testament as a cheap literary product. From their point of view such Semitisms must have seemed to be so impossible. Very probably the same feeling that an English or an American will get when they read my works in English. As much as I try to do it – and no one tried in the New Testament to remove the Semitic frame of mind and even vocabulary – like I said, as much as I may try I won't be able to remove my Italian frame of mine and even phrase constructions when I write in English.

Chapter Three

Hebrew Words in the New Testament

As it is clear by now to the reader, the only Greek things we find in the New Testament is the language. Thoughts, religious terminology, ideas, background, all belongs to the Jewish world.

Some Hebrew words have been only transliterated into Greek and retained in the New Testament as we now read it in the Greek manuscripts and by consequence, in our translations too.

Matthew 1:23

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name **Emmanuel**, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

As it usually happens in these instances, the Hebrew is retained and the translation given.

Some say that Matthew was quoting the Greek translation of the Old Testament here, the famous Septuagint. But even if he did, he goes further giving the interpretation of that Hebrew name to the Greek reader.

Mark 3:17

“And James the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them **Boanerges**, which is, The sons of thunder.”

Mark 5:41

“And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, **Talitha cumi**; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.”

Mark 7:11

“But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban*, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free.*”

Mark 7:34

“And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, **Ephphatha**, that is, Be opened.”

Again we read the Hebrew word used by Jesus and the translation.

This is also one of the reasons why a doubt that the Gospels as we know them were once written in Hebrew or Aramaic. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to explain such practice of keeping some original terms and then give the translation.

John 1:41

“He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the **Messias**, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”

Messiah is a word that entered our vocabulary from the Hebrew language. Christ comes from its Greek translation, *Kristos*.

John 1:49

“Nathanael answered and saith unto him, **Rabbi**, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.”

Rabbi is not translated. It is so common as a term that it is still alive in our languages today.

John 20:16

“Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, **Rabboni**; which is to say, Master.”

John 19:13

“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, **Gabbatha**.”

John 19:17¹

“And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called *the place* of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew **Golgotha**”

In the last two instances, the translation is given before the Hebrew word.

In **John 19:19-20** we find this very instructive information.

“And Pilate wrote a title, and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in **Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin**.”

Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire. Hebrew was the language of Israel. Quite significant is the fact that Greek was present too.

When I saw the film by Mel Gibson “The Passion of the Christ”, the movie was not in English but in the native language of Israel. The only words I was able to

¹ The same detail is found in Matthew 27:33 and Mark 15:22.

understand were those pronounced by Pilate when asking Jesus: “What is truth?” Indeed, Greek was a language widely used. I believe that even Jesus must have spoken it during his ministry.

Matthew 21:9

“And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, **Hosanna** to the Son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; **Hosanna** in the highest.”

The word Hosanna, is the transliteration of the Hebrew *hoshia'na*. As it happens very often with words, it is very difficult to translate it in our western languages. We can translate it with: “Save now!” But it is far more than that, like the quotation of the Messianic passage attached to it reveals. It was the cry of the people to their promised Messiah coming to save them. Of course, the people had no idea how wonderful and perfect freedom and salvation the Messiah was about to bring into this world.

Matthew 27:46

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

And its parallel passage,

Mark 15:34

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?** which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

As I spoke earlier, I discovered Mark when I read it in Greek. There is a difference here between Matthew and Mark that is evident also in our translation here. Matthew says of the Hebrew expression “that is to say” and then explains the meaning of the phrase. Mark is more technical and speaks of a translation openly when he writes, “being interpreted.”

But in the first chapters of Matthew, the words in Hebrew of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mountain are kept, but no translation is provided. As if the author gave for granted that the reader was able to manage those expressions as well.

Matthew 5:18

“For verily (**Amen**) I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one **jot** or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

What the translators here rendered as “verily” in the original is not a Greek word but the Hebrew *Amen* simply transliterated. No translation was given of the term. The same applies to the next Hebrew term *jot*. It is the name of the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Of course, Jesus meant to say that not even the smallest part of the Law will pass away.

I will say more about the word *Amen* in the following chapter.

Matthew 5:22

“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, **Raca**, shall be in danger of the council (**Sanhedrin**): but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Raca is a Hebrew word. Again here the Hebrew transliterated word *Sanhedrin* is translated “council” in the KJV.

For sure these terms were entirely foreign to the Greek language.

I am Italian. Very often when I speak to my American friends I am forced to rely on my Italian vocabulary, since no correspondent word is found in English for some typical Italian things. *Pasta* is *pasta*, both here in Sicily – where I live – as in America. *Pizza* is *pizza*, whether I speak English or Italian, it is still *pizza* and no other equivalent word is found in the English dictionary. It could only be assimilated and learned as it is, in the English speaking countries.

The Christian Faith continued in the road already trodden by the Hebrew Faith. The first could only assimilate the religious terminology of the latter.

Matthew 6:24

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and **mammon**.”

The peculiarity of this Semitic term is the fact that it is present in the New Testament but unlike the other words, it is declined according to the rules of the Greek language.

Chapter Four

Hebrew words in our languages

There are some words that the New Testament borrowed from the Hebrew and kept into the Greek and we still find them in our translations today. We saw some instances in the previous chapter. Some of these words have become so familiar to us, they are used so frequently and with a unique untranslatable meaning, that we can fairly say that they have become part of our languages. This is true both inside and outside of churches. Though, it is only in churches and in religious language and use they are most honoured in respect to their original meaning.

I will consider some.

AMEN

This is by far the most common of all the words that the Jewish tradition has handed down to the Christian Faith.

It is found so many times in the New Testament. As we have already seen, the translators of our Bibles translated the Hebrew word retained in the Greek New Testament, most of the times.

The e-sword Bible software tells me that the word is present in 50 verses of the KJV where it was not translated but simply transliterated in our alphabet.

It appears for the first time in Matthew 6:13: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil *one*. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. **Amen.**”

Its last occurrence is the very last word written in the New Testament. Revelation 22:21: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ *be* with all the saints. **Amen.**”

The KJV translated *Verily, verily* the expression found in the Greek, *Amen, amen*.

My e-sword software tells me it occurs in 25 verses in the Gospel of John. It is peculiar of this Gospel and you will not find it anywhere else in the New Testament.

As I said earlier, in this case also we speak of “Hebrew thoughts and ideas, even linguistic use, simply adapted to the Greek tongue.”

Repeating the word twice is again peculiar to the Hebrew tongue and has no equivalent in the English language. It wants to emphasise the word used, strengthening in the listeners the truth that was going to be revealed.

In my native language, we have this same construction. We say “piano piano” when we want to say “very slowly”. “Tanto tanto” when we intend to say “really a lot.”

“Vicino vicino” when we want to describe a tender intimacy of someone close to another person, like “very close.” “Ora ora” or “adesso adesso” tends to stress the idea that something happened seconds or minutes before.

Evidently John did not know how to translate in Greek such an idea, and since *Amen* had already entered the church as terminology of the Christian faith, he simply reported the expression of Jesus as he uttered that.

HALLELUJAH

The impact that this word has had in Christian countries is extraordinary. Unfortunately it is used sometimes out of context outside of the blessed use of praising God and inviting all the believers to praise God at the same time.

This word is translated in the Old Testament of the KJV. Psalm 111:1 reads: “Praise ye the LORD. (Halleluyah) I will praise the LORD with *my* whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and *in* the congregation.”

It is transliterated in the New Testament. Revelation 19:1, “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, **Alleluia**; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God.”

This word is found only 4 times in the KJV and all in Revelation 19.

ABBA

Mark 14:36

“And he said, **Abba**, Father, all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

Romans 8:15

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, **Abba**, Father.”

Galatians 4:6

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, **Abba**, Father.”

It is an Aramaic familiar word translated in the New Testament itself in Greek and then in our translations, as *father*. Though it is closer to the *daddy* my son usually calls me than to unusual *father*. Such familiar term is one of the most precious words of our faith.

MARANATHA

Paul used this word in 1Corinthians 16:22, which reads: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema **Maranatha.**”

This word was so part of the Christian vocabulary that it was sufficient for Paul to simply use it, with no need to add anything to it, to be sure the recipient of his writing knew what he meant to say.

It is Aramaic and the meaning is explained by the Bible itself in **Revelation 22:20** “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, **come, Lord Jesus.**”

This word in itself was able to recall the faith about the return of Jesus and is in itself a prayer to him.

I believe the ambivalence of the Aramaic word, which could not be translated – it happens often when attempting to translate from one language to another. This could be a reason why it was kept in use. In itself the Aramaic term could mean:

- Our Lord has come
- Our Lord is present
- Our Lord, come!

I am so excited about the deep meaning of this word, which condenses the blessed hope of our faith, that I have learned to use it in my letters.

MESSIAH

John 1:41

“He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the **Messias**, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”

John 4:25

“The woman saith unto him, I know that **Messias** cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.”

This term is so common that it is not used as much as Christ, but with a better understanding of all the implications of the term. In fact, it has created the adjective Messianic that has no other synonymous originating from the word Christ. The latter became more a name to be added to that of Jesus, to better identify him. But Messiah never lost the deep religious meaning attached to it.

Conclusion

Has the Hebrew background of the Bible been lost in the new faith of the New Testament?

By no means.

On the contrary, it is alive and well today. It is there in the Greek language, in every verse of the Bible and is still visible in our modern translations. It has become part of our daily lives in the form of language, teachings, beliefs. Instead of disappearing, it is still predominant in the Christian doctrine and practice.

It is there when we say *Amen* in our Christian services. It is there when we shout *Halleluyah* to God in our congregations. It is there when we call Jesus “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords.”

The Hebrew religious language and culture have deeply influenced us Christians. It is part of our heritage. Without it there would be no Christianity. This is how much we owe to it and we must look at the Jewish religion with a deep sense of respect. Those who don't, neglect to see that Jesus was a Jew. He was born from the seed of David². He was circumcised. He went to the Synagogues, read the Scriptures and explained them to the people. That is why they would call him *Rabbi*. All his life, not only was lived according to the Tanakh³ but as a fulfilment of it. Denying Judaism means to deny Jesus and ourselves as Christians, followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

I have read books by writers who complain that the Hebrew mind and language has been lost in the New Testament and in Christianity. Though to some extent, when translating from one language to another such a thing is inevitable, the case with the New Testament is quite peculiar. I believe the Jewish background and religious terminology was so strong that it could not disappear when the New Testament was written in Greek. On the contrary it influenced the Greek so much that: the language was Greek but the construction of sentences was distinctly Hebrew; some original terms could not be properly translated so they were simply kept in the text; even when some words were translated, that could not destroy their Semitic value.

For example, the root of our word *prophet* which speaks of a person foretelling the future is lost because the *prophet* of the New Testament is still the Hebrew *Nabi*.

In Italy, Evangelical Christians salute themselves with the word “Pace”, *Peace*. Though we are Italians and our word derives from the Latin and not the Greek, what

² I found myself naturally using this Semitic expression. I decided to keep it in the text, as a little evidence that what I say in my writing is true.

³ Tanakh stands for Torah, Law, Nev'im, Prophets, Ketuvim, Writings, which is the way the Jew would refer to their entire Hebrew Scripture Canon. Jesus himself referred to this when he said in Luke 24:44 “And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the **law** of Moses, and *in* the **prophets**, and *in* the **psalms**, concerning me.”

we mean when we say *pax* has nothing to do with the *pax romana*. It is the Hebrew *Shalom*, with all the deep meanings it carries with it, that it implies.

We need to be aware and proud of the Hebrew roots of our Christian faith.

In closing, I think it would not be off the subject to mention here that, in this perspective, it is impossible for a Christian – a true Christian – to be animated by feelings of anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism. It is like a son hating his own parent. It is like a person hating himself.

Such feeling was never advocated in the New Testament, such a feeling cannot be advocated – like any form of hate, anyway – by an Christian individually or corporally.

SHALOM.