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Outline Lecture Notes for a Meeting of the Fraternity on 3 February 1970
at the Fraternity Headquarters by Professor David Flusser
on 'Anti-Jewish Motives in the post-Apostolic Period'

There exists a famous Latin play from the Middle Ages, the Play of Daniel, in which the author shows a deep understanding of the old Jewish history, and a deep sympathy for the ancient Jews. At the end of the play, Daniel prophesies the coming of Christ:

Ecce venit sanctus ille
sanctorum sanctissimus,
quem Rex iste jubet coli
potens et fortissimus.

Cessent plana, cessit regnum
cessabit et unctio;
instat regni Judaeorum
finis et oppressio.

('Behold the holy one comes, the most holy of the holy, whom the King, mighty and powerful, commands you to adore. The temples cease, the kingdom ends, the anointings also shall be over; the end of the kingdom of the Jews and its suppression is at hand.') Thus the coming of Christ means the end of the Jews.

The first mention of Israel by a Gentile is the following statement of the Pharaoh Merneptah: 'Carried off is Ashkelon; seized is Geser; Yanoam is made as that which does not exist; Israel is laid waste, his seed is not.' Thus the first Gentile utterance about Israel is a proclamation of its non-existence. And this happened in the time when Moses lived! If I am not wrong, this was also a glorious time for the Christian future.

I don't want to explain the mystery of the existing non-existence of Israel and its deeper meaning, not only because this meaning is linked with very real suffering and martyrdom without end. But I am sufficiently objective to acknowledge that in the case of Christianity, the story would be more logical if the children of Israel would disappear some decades after the crucifixion; especially because even if it is not historically true, from the literary point of view Jewry has to play in the story the role of the villain. Christ was born among the Jews, there were Jews who approved his death, and these who did not, but by his resurrection he became victorious over his enemies. As the Jews did not accept Christianity and 'rejected' their Messiah, they were rejected by God. If they would be destroyed, or even would simply disappear, this would be, I understand, a literary and theological justice. However, if Christianity is the true heir of the ancient Judaism, it is logical that an heir in the full sense of the word, can only be an heir if his father is dead.

At the beginning, it could even seem that Jewry would shortly disappear. This was the opinion of Meliten of Sardis, who is a first witness of the accusation of deicide: Jewry, which killed God, awaits only its death. As Judaism existed further, there arose a hope that it will be destroyed at the end of days. In the VIth book of the Sibylline Oracles, a beautiful Christian hymn says it very plainly: only Jewry will suffer evil pains, because Jews have not recognised their God when he came, and they crucified him. The description of how the Jews crucified Jesus resembles Meliten's words about the same subject. A better hope for the Jews can be found in the VIIIth book of Sibylline Oracles (324-336). The author hopes that Sion will recognise her Saviour and wash herself from his blood and abandon her ritual law.

The first who proclaimed the future conversion of Israel to the new faith was Paul. He was sure that at the end the whole of Israel would be saved. It would be interesting to see if and how Paul's position influenced Patristic literature. As far as I know, the real meaning of Paul's eschatological hope for Israel's salvation through conversion was not discovered before modern times, and even now this meaning is not accepted by all. This is a very significant fact.

What shall happen to the Jews in the meantime, before their final conversion? The idea that finally Jews will accept Christianity can be found in some old Christian authors independently from the Epistle to the Romans. These authors often linked their hope with Malachi's prophecy about the coming of Elijah, who will appear before the second coming of Christ. St. Augustine and others thought that Elijah's main task will then be to convert the Jews. Other authors, especially the popular ones, thought that at the end of the days Jews will be destroyed.

But if Jews will be finally all converted, recognising the truth of Christianity, what is the task of the Jews in the present? The opinion of St. Augustine is well known: they have to be a living witness for Christianity. With the exception of the works of the second century Apologists, I have not found any mention of another positive task for the present existence of the Jews. As anti-Jewish motifs were prevalent in the Patristic literature, a lack of a positive evaluation of Jewish existence became ominous in the Middle Ages because only a positive theology could be a force against Christian anti-Judaism. This can be seen from the fact that the only quasi-positive point of evaluation of the Jews in Christian Antiquity preserved the Jews from destruction: it was impossible to deny that Jews, in contrast to the Pagans, worshipped the same God as the Christians. Thus Judaism could not be forbidden. This small light was one of the causes why, humanly speaking, Judaism and Jews could survive. This does not mean that there were not in the Patristic literature reflections about positive values of contemporary Jewish religion. Typical e.g. is the idealistic hope of Justin Martyr. He says to the Jew Tryphon that it is not a flattery when he expresses his hope that Jerusalem will be rebuilt; the eschatological Jerusalem will be peopled by good Christians and by good Jews who lived before Christ's life.

It seems that in the Middle Ages more positive ideas about Judaism and Jews arose, but it is only in modern times that Jewish-Christian brotherhood was discovered. In Antiquity, only pre-Christian Judaism could be appreciated. The only exception, as already said, were the Apologists, especially the early ones, as Aristides, who could see in contemporary Jewry the bearers of positive values of pre-Christian Judaism. The Apologists were in a similar situation to Christianity today: the greater part of humanity was then non-Christian. Today there are more hopes for a real brotherhood between Jews and Christians, not only because of the present non-Christian forces, but because there are positive possibilities for such a brotherhood in the very structure of both Judaism and Christianity. But to treat these hopes surpasses the scope of this lecture.