

Passover: Key 73

BY RABBI EDWARD T. SANDROW

There is a heated debate being carried on by scholars and rabbis and leaders in the Jewish Community on the missionizing implications of "Key 73" as Passover approaches. One school of thought has expressed indignation and a sense of shock that elements in the church should spend so much money and manpower in an effort to "save the souls of the unchurched", meaning "spiritually wandering Jews." In spite of the change in the conventional Christian image of the Jews, and contrary to the spirit of Vatican II and the pronouncements of Protestant scholars such as the late Reinhold Niebuhr, the reality is that the Jew, more than the other so-called "unchurched" is the prime target. The other school of thought is less "hysterical" about the implications of "Key 73." It urges the Jewish community not to get excited about it. After all, this is a free country and in the competitive arena for minds and souls, the church can do what it wants. It

is up to the Jewish community to be resolute and become so spiritually revitalized that it transcends such a challenge.

The issue is clear and Passover has a message which ought to answer the church, on the one hand, and vindicate the position of the Jewish people, on the other. Young and thoughtful Jews ought to ponder over it. The key to the missionizing gospel is the messianism of Jesus. The church believes that Jesus as the Messiah has already come. He was to bring about the Kingdom of God, of peace and justice for all people. And while christianity contributed to the spiritual progress of mankind, it took the philosopher - physician - rabbi Maimonides to express the Jewish view when he wrote "... the teachings of Jesus the Nazarene... were intended to pave the way for the coming of the King Messiah and to prepare the whole world to worship God together as one." He meant that the real Messiah would not arrive until there would be an end to slavery, and that he (the Messiah) would abolish war, would end hunger and disease and special inequality. How could the Jewish people, through inquisi-

tion and auto d fe and pogrom, accept Jesus as the Messiah? Where was all the freedom and love for which humanity waited? With all its respect for a fellow Jew, the Jewish people could not embrace Christianity or its founder, since to the Jew, he was not the Messiah, nor did he usher in that messianic age, which the Bible or Jewish tradition anticipated. "Jews for Jesus" is a comfortable slogan for some, but an historical aberration.

For the Jew, the Messiah has not appeared as yet. That is why he sits down at the Seder table and recalls the slavery of his ancestors in Egypt. He looks at the world and knows there is violence and poverty and hostility. He goes through what the late Professor Heschel called "an act of self-engagement of the spirit." He dedicates himself to human freedom. He seeks a connection between the FIRST redemption from Egypt and the FINAL redemption in the days of the Messiah. That is why he sings the lines from the Haggadah, "Let all who are hungry come and eat." The Jew wants the world to be converted, not by sweet talk or pressure, EVERYMAN IN HIS OWN WAY,



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