"THE TEACHINGS OF SILVANUS" (NHC VII,4) AND JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

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One of the most remarkable contributions of the one to whom this book is dedicated is his unceasing plea in support of the thesis that Judaism and Jewish Christianity had a profound influence on the development of ancient Christian thought.¹ In the case of the Nag Hammadi Coptic library, he has repeatedly demonstrated that the Gospel of Thomas is incomprehensible unless it is considered from the point of view of Jewish Christianity. He has also argued ² that it would be wise to take into consideration the Jewish Christian background of The Teachings of Silvanus, a document of Alexandrian Hellenistic Christianity, although this writing itself is of Catholic and orthodox character. The following pages are offered as an answer to this suggestion and a token of gratitude by one who, during many years of cooperation, has learned not a little from Quispel's knowledge of ancient Christianity and Gnosticism.

The Teachings of Silvanus, dating from the third quarter of the fourth century, can be traced back to a Greek original of about the second century, a period in which the influence of Jewish Christianity was still alive.³ Although "Silvanus" was a popular preacher and Clement of Alexandria was a thinker well versed in Hellenistic thought, their ideas can be compared, and both of them appear to be under the influence of Stoicism as regards their ethics and Platonism as regards their concept of God and ontology.⁴

² VC 33, 1979, 85.
The main characteristics of *The Teachings of Silvanus* do not, therefore primarily reflect Judaism. The only apostle mentioned in *Sil* is Paul (Sil 108,30), and the name Silvanus is probably a pseudepigraphical borrowing from the companion of Paul, whereas in Jewish Christian writings James and Peter appear as the most authoritative apostles. Moreover, Jewish-Christian writings sometimes bear anti-Pauline traces. However, we must not forget that it was the Jewish branch of Christianity which brought the Gospel to Egypt. This was a consequence of the Jerusalem agreement between James and Peter on the one hand and Paul and Barnabas on the other (*Acts 15,1-21*; *Gal. 2,7-10*). It is generally accepted that the branches of Christianity in Syria and Egypt derived from Jerusalem. Egyptian citizens, whether aboriginal or Greek, received the message of Christ as it was passed to them by Jewish Christianity. Apart from that, clear relations between Hellenistic Judaism and Hellenistic Christianity in Egypt have been demonstrated. It is, therefore indisputable that Egyptian Christianity has drawn on Jewish Christian sources. Without contending that *Sil* is a typical representative of Jewish Christianity one could believe that it is possible to find in it some concepts or terms which betray a Jewish-Christian origin. This and nothing more is the purpose of the following contribution.

Of course, when we deal with the question of Jewish Christianity we are at once involved in the problems of defining precisely what it is and determining what its extant sources are. One of the most likely documents of Jewish Christianity would appear to be *The Gospel of the Hebrews* mentioned by Clement and Origen. Those who

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5 Further quoted as *Sil*.
7 G. Quispel, in *VC* 19, 1965, 65; M. Hornschuh, *Studien zur Epistula Apostolorum* (*PTS* 5), Berlin 1965, 114; further abbreviated as “Hornschuh”.
9 Daniélou, 5; 17ff.