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“And after the fire a soft murmuring sound...” The Abiding Significance of Judaism for Christian Identity

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I. Perspectives Beyond the Pioneer Phase

In recent years, Christian individual and ecclesiastical identity have reached a stage that was unimaginable in the 1970s and '80s. Those years were still marked by optimistic beliefs in progress and modernism, ideological narrative traditions drawn from general history and the church's attempts to keep pace with secularism. The Catholic Church was inspired by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and many Protestant churches experimented with various individual forms of Christian identity. The privatization of Christian life in both denominations was in full bloom.

With respect to the Jewish-Christian dialogue, pioneer work was set into motion during those years.¹ On the one hand, the direct and indirect involvement of the churches and the Christian worldview regarding the Shoah became more and more evident. The process of acknowledging their role in this historical trauma that drove European Jewry toward extermination and shook the foundations of European culture was undertaken. This process could not occur without detours and resistance, as demonstrated, for example, by the long overdue debate about unidentified Jewish funds in Switzerland in the 1990s. Still, this process could not be stopped. On the other hand, the rootedness of Christian identity in Judaism was brought to consciousness as well. Jesus, Paul, and the early Church were placed into their contemporary Jewish context.²

¹ Hans Hermann Henrix offers an easily readable overview of the development of Jewish-Christian dialogue in his *Judentum und Christentum. Gemeinschaft wider Willen* (Topos plus Taschenbuch, Kevelaer, 2004).

² The Ten Theses of Seelisberg 1947 exemplify this rediscovery. They are published by: International Council of Christians and Jews, ed., *Reports and Recommendations of the Emergency Conference on Anti-Semitism* (Geneva, London, 1947), 14ff. See also my article on Seelisberg on p. 34ff in this issue. For the rediscovery of the Jesus Movement and early Christian History as part of the Jewish History, see David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1988); Schalom Ben-Chorin's three books from the

The significance and the connection between the Old and the New Testament were studied in-depth.³ The parallel character of Sabbath and Sunday, of Easter and Passover, became apparent, and the theological core concepts such as creation, revelation, redemption, covenant, messianism, and the last days were discussed and re-interpreted from both Jewish and Christian perspectives.⁴

Besides this scientific research and the educational work in the churches, for the first time in history a positive and constitutive connection between Church and Synagogue was also expressed at the highest level of ecclesiastical authority. From a Catholic point of view, the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, promulgated by the Vatican Council, created a break-through in this new theology, representing indeed a revolutionary act of reversal and repentance.⁵ Pope John Paul II is to be remembered as the one who – unlike anybody before him – created bridges to

Jewish point of view: *Bruder Jesus, Paul and Mutter Mirjam* (Gütersloher Publishing Haus, rpt. 2005-2006). Discussions about the existence of Christian and Rabbinic identity since Alan F. Segal's *Rebecca's Children, Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Harvard University Press, 1986) is noted under the heading "Parting of the Ways."

³ See Christoph Dohmen and Thomas Söding, eds., *Eine Bibel – zwei Testamente. Positionen biblischer Theologie* (Paderborn, 1995).

⁴ See Clemens Thoma, *Das Messiasprojekt. Theologie jüdisch-christlicher Begegnung* (Augsburg, 1994); Clemens Thoma und Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Lexikon der jüdisch-christlichen Begegnung. Hintergründe, Klärungen, Perspektiven* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1997); Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, eds., *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁵ For its Fortieth Jubilee in 2005, several articles concerning the history and interpretation of *Nostra Aetate* were published: Josef Sinkovits and Ulrich Winkler, eds., *Weltkirche und Weltreligionen. Die Brisanz des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils 40 Jahre nach Nostra Aetate*, Salzburger Theologische Studien – interkulturell 3 (Innsbruck, Wien, 2007) 97-159; Roman A. Siebenrock, *Vorläufige Überlegungen auf dem Weg zu einem erneuerten Verständnis der Konzilerklärung "Nostra Aetate"* in Wassilowsky, ed., *Zweites Vatikanum – vergessene Anstösse, gegenwärtige Fortschreibungen, QD 207* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 2004).

Judaism and the Jewish people through speeches, symbolic gestures, and face-to-face encounters. The documents of the Protestant churches in Germany in no way lagged behind in this renewal of Jewish-Christian relations.⁶ Beginning with the linkage of Christianity to Judaism, attempts were made to rephrase their entire systematic theology, a route followed, for example, by the Barthian theologians Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt and Paul van Buren.

This pioneer phase in the Jewish-Christian dialogue is ending as the generation of its participants retires. In addition, a new social context now challenges the dialogue: post-secular society with its multicultural and global characteristics. The Jewish-Christian encounter is now regarded much more in the context of dialogue with other world religions and is included in early drafts of theology of religions. In such a pluralistic theory of religions the Jewish-Christian relationship is described in categories no longer originating from a theological context, but drawn rather from philosophical perspectives or from Asiatic origins.⁷ Particularly, the presence of Islam in Europe has led to the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism, opening new doors to the connections among the three monotheistic religions.⁸

This generational change in Jewish-Christian dialogue and society's new multi-religious constellation leads Jews and Christians

⁶ The collected Documents are available in: Rudolf Rendtorff, Hans Hermann Henrix, et. al., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*, Vol. 1 Dokumente von 1945 bis 1985, Vol. 2 Dokumente von 1986 bis 2000 (Paderborn, 1988/2001).

⁷ See John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Gott ohne Grenzen. Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen* (Gütersloh, 2006).

⁸ Karl Josef Kuschel has made valuable contributions to the topic of Abrahamic Ecumenism in *Streit um Abraham. Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt – und was sie eint* (Düsseldorf, 2006); in “*Jud, Christ und Muslim vereinigt?*” *Lessings Nathan der Weise* (Düsseldorf, 2004); and in *Juden-Christen-Muslime: Herkunft und Zukunft* (Düsseldorf, 2007).

alike to search for a new paradigm for their particular dialogue. This upheaval has been regarded by many as a crisis. A demonstration of this transitional stage is the difficulty in approaching young people through the established dialogue structures. Another example is the dispute between Edward Kessler, director of the Centre for the Study of Christian-Jewish Relations in Cambridge, and Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, resident preacher at the Vatican, as reported this past spring in the Catholic weekly *The Tablet*.⁹ Kessler objected that the sermons at the Vatican during the Holy Week were not sufficiently cautious regarding an anti-Jewish presentation of Christ's Passion, and that Cantalamessa did not take into consideration Jewish sensitivity to Jewish-Christian relations experienced under Pope John Paul II, whose era seems to have evaporated. Cantalamessa defended himself, pointing out his endeavors for a good relationship with Jews, without, however, contributing anything new or positive to the dialogue. These instances of difficulties and aggravations serve as sufficient indicators of an upheaval in the Jewish-Christian relationship.

My reference here to a certain upheaval does not imply a serious existential crisis in the Jewish-Christian relationship. Without over-dramatizing, let me recall the prophet Elijah, in particular the texts in 1 Kings 18 and 19. After having fought the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, commissioned by YHWH, he came to a point of crisis. Elijah wanted to relinquish his call as a prophet and die. But following this first phase of his life and work as a prophet, Elijah returned to Sinai, where he received a completely new task from YHWH – to anoint a new king. Elijah could no longer access the God who in Exodus revealed the Torah through fire, earthquake, and storm. But that same God now revealed himself in “a soft murmuring sound” (1K 19:12). Elijah's image of God was revised as he received tasks that were altered in order to deal with a new situation. Elijah was shaken by such a new orientation. The Jewish-Christian

⁹ *The Tablet*, 24 April and 12 May 2007.

dialogue after its first phase of strong motivation and hard labor has come to a turning point too. It now needs to go back to its roots to be able to define its tasks anew. Weighing the impact of the Shoah and acknowledging Judaism as the root to Christianity are not only entering into a new phase. Completely new questionings and situations are finding their way into our consciousness as well.

Future Jewish-Christian encounters will need to deal with five important tasks, which involve both action and inquiry.¹⁰ I will address each briefly.

Jewish-Christian Dialogue for All. The valuable fruits of the new mutual understandings achieved since the *Shoah* must be strengthened and anchored in the wider ecclesiastical and lay communities. The insights gained into the similarities and differences between Christians and Jews is in danger of becoming lost in a broader interreligious dialogue. The fact that the Jesus movement and the original Church were Jewish is by no means a historical accident; on the contrary, it leads the Church to accept by faith God's covenant with the Jewish people. On the other hand, Jews have to understand that, through their concept of messianism, a religion came into existence that still today also carries typically Jewish aspirations out into the greater world. They should acknowledge that Rabbinic Judaism took shape under Christian influence and for centuries

has been affected by developments in Christianity.¹¹ Now it is up to educators of youth and adults, to preachers and to liturgists to enable believers without a theological background to understand and accept the close link between Christianity and Judaism which had been kept secret for so long. This dialogue must not remain an area only for specialists and people particularly interested in the subject. Rather, all Jews and Christians are meant to reflect on this central theme of identity.¹²

History Shows the Way. The pioneer phase of the dialogue was strongly affected by the process of coming to terms with the *Shoah*. In the present situation, the Middle East conflict and, in particular, the politics of the State of Israel is a subject that strongly influences Jewish-Christian relations in Europe. The achievements derived from an in-depth study of the *Shoah* must be continually passed on, and developing a theological understanding of the existence of the State of Israel is a fundamental agenda item for any future dialogue! However, the history of the Jewish-Christian encounter must not be limited to these topics. An extensive, inclusive memory is called for – an overview that covers the complete history of past centuries from the beginnings of Jewish-Christian interactions. The patristic and talmudic periods, respectively, and their mutual influences and interactions are of particular importance.¹³ We should also include periods like the Crusades, the “golden age” of medieval

¹⁰ Over the past years future perspectives for Jewish-Roman Catholic discussions have been addressed frequently. For example, during the Fortieth Jubilee year of *Nostra Aetate* Cardinal Walter Kasper, on March 9, 2006, spoke on “*Nostra Aetate* und die Zukunft des jüdisch-christlichen Dialogs” at the first meeting of the Rabbis of Germany with representatives of Catholic and Protestant Churches. See: *Freiburger Rundbrief, Neue Folge*, 2 (2007):104-118. Michael A. Signer published “40 Jahre nach Nostra aetate. Gibt es im Dialog neue Inhalte?” in Josef Sinkovits und Ulrich Winkler, eds., *Weltkirche und Weltreligionen. Die Brisanz des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils 40 Jahre nach Nostra Aetate - Salzburger Theologische Studien – interkulturell 3* (Innsbruck, Wien, 2007), 97-113.

¹¹ Michel Hilton, “*Wie es sich christelt, so jüdet es sich*”. *2000 Jahre christlicher Einfluss auf das jüdische Leben* (Berlin, 2000).

¹² Consider the calls by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC), the platform of the Vatican and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, as for example at its nineteenth meeting in Cape Town, November 2006. The declaration is printed in *Freiburger Rundbrief, Neue Folge*, No. 2/2007, 119-122.

¹³ See, for example, the works of Daniel Boyarin: *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (University of California Press, 1997); *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford University Press, 1999); *Border Lines, The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Spain and the tragic expulsion of the Jews in 1492, the upswing of Jewish mysticism in the sixteenth century, the Jewish struggle with modernity in nineteenth century Germany. With regard to the challenge of remaining religious even after the Enlightenment, this last era is of highest importance.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The Jewish-Christian encounter has been placed into the broader spectrum of interreligious dialogue, partly through the global context, partly because of the Middle-East conflict. This is particularly due to the conflict between western society, influenced by Christianity and Judaism, and the oriental Islam-dominated world, which demands that the West also enter into dialogue with Islam. Jews and Christians must reconsider their relationships towards Muslims separately since each relationship has unique historical connections and different theological questions that must be discussed. Nevertheless, the fact that the three monotheistic religions share faith in the same God and in the heritage of Abraham also demands that they enter into a trilateral dialogue. In this context, it is of primary importance seriously to consider the three religions' different concepts and interpretations of God's revelation.¹⁴

The Concept of Faith in a Global Society. The crucial challenge for the future of religions is not, in my opinion, the question of interreligious dialogue, even though this is often claimed. It is more important for Jews and Christians together with other religious believers to renew their stance in a post-enlightened society. In this post-secular world, with its tendency to re-spiritualization, it becomes necessary to reconsider the relationship between religion and civil society. How is it

¹⁴ Regarding interreligious dialogue in Switzerland, see my report: "Vom Religionspluralismus zum Dialog. Interreligiöse Initiativen in der Schweiz" in *Stimmen der Zeit*, 131 No.12 (2006), 795-808.

possible to justify faith in the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ in the contexts of global development, of the new scientific knowledge, and of the new openness to spirituality? Fundamentalist sects, privatization of faith, and religion as a spiritual adornment in the capitalist world, cannot be the paths to follow, neither for Jews nor for Christians. Religious relativism, by regarding religion only as an expression of the human need for transcendence diluted into a world created by human beings sacrifices the living God. God's revelation must be rethought and explained anew, as, for example, Prof. Othmar Keel argues, suggesting that monotheistic religions need to rewrite their biographies.¹⁵

Dialogue Promotes Personal Identity. When Jews and Christians are communicating with each other and with society and culture as a whole, then they will also be transformed by their common history. Consciously entering into an encounter requires an ability to deal with one's self-perception and one's perception by the Other. Paradoxically, in this drawing near to the Other lies the actual drive to confront one's own roots and one's own vocation. The effects of the Jewish-Christian dialogue on both Judaism and Christianity must be accompanied by awareness and reflection. Thus from discourse emerges an identity beyond that existing in monolithic separation, one worthy of believers who feel committed to the God of all humankind and of all creation.¹⁶

¹⁵ Thomas Staubli, ed., *Vertikale Ökumene. Erinnerungsarbeit im Dienst des interreligiösen Dialogs, mit Beiträgen von Othmar Keel, Ulrike Bechmann und Wolfgang Lienemann* (Fribourg, 2006).

¹⁶ On identity through dialogue see Martin Buber, *Ich und Du*, (Gerlingen 12/1994); Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Identität" in *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, 31, (Berlin 1987), 57-67; Dan Bar-On, *Die Anderen in uns. Dialog als Modell der interkulturellen Konfliktbewältigung*, (Hamburg 2001).

II. Identity Development through Dialogue

I will now elaborate on this last theme by raising the theological question: What meaning does Judaism have for Christian identity? The reciprocal theological question – What does Christianity mean for Jews? – I will leave for my Jewish colleagues to answer.

The Catholic Church, sees itself not only as a religious institution that promotes Christianity, not only as a social entity, but also as a significant mystical reality. The Second Vatican Council, in *Lumen Gentium* 1:1-8, explicated its awareness of the Church's mystical dimension, conscious that it owes its existence to God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the diffusion of the Spirit of the Risen Lord. The Council document *Nostra Aetate*, concerning interreligious dialogue, further states that, as the Church probes the depths of its own mystery, it discovers its bonds to Judaism (NA, 4). As Paul already reflects in his letter to the Romans (9-11), the Church is mysteriously connected to Judaism, not only in God's self-revelation in the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, but also through the covenant on Mount Sinai with the Israelites. In the twentieth century, Pope John Paul II declared that dialogue with Judaism is not an extrinsic task for the Church, but that Judaism is intrinsic to the self-understanding of Christianity.¹⁷ It is possible to speak of Judaism as the constituting Other of Christianity, a fact unfortunately too often largely suppressed historically. However, admitting this relatedness opens the road to growth towards a dialogical existence.

The question arises as to how the Church is linked to the Synagogue. I am not pursuing the question of what the Jewish part of internal Christianity identity consists, but rather in what

¹⁷ See his 1980 address to the Central Council of the Jews in Germany and the Rabbinic Conference in Mainz, and his address at the Great Synagogue in Rome, April 13, 1986.

way Christianity is a kind of Jewish religion for non-Jews. Much has been written on this subject. I am asking about the connection of the Church to Judaism in the present social context marked by a new, post-secular era, friendly to religion. This question is critical, on the one hand, because many people currently very involved with world religions have little or practically no interest in Judaism. On the other hand, there are those involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue who are initiating an openness towards dialogue with Islam, but who are scarcely involved in worldwide interreligious dialogue. I have previously addressed this phenomenon more thoroughly in this very journal.¹⁸ So, I would like to ask: What meaning does Judaism have for Christianity situated in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society? What are the topics and themes appropriate to this present Christian existence that also derive from the dialogue with Judaism?

To refer once again to the experience of Elijah: The churches have heard the powerful voice of YHWH on Mount Sinai, giving God's people the Torah that Judaism has venerated in its history up to this day. It marked the pioneer phase of Jewish-Christian dialogue. How are we today to understand God's "soft murmuring sound" connecting Christianity to Judaism through dialogue?

Declaration of Faith in Monotheism

For quite a long time monotheism has been attacked, initially by philosophical discussions reproaching it for oppressing human freedom and poisoning life's joys. Biblical monotheism is said to have implanted a sense of guilt rooted in excessive ethical demands. Since Nietzsche, some perceive a cry for another God, for a dionysian God. Odo Marquard, in his "Praise

¹⁸ "Jewish Christian Dialogue and the Theology of Religions" in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 1 (2005-2006) 53-66. (<http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol1/iss1/7>)

for Polytheism” summed up the spirit of the age, according to which polytheism is more conscious of human needs.¹⁹ In addition, totally new and weighty inquiries have been addressed to monotheism within the interreligious and global context. Buddhists, for example, challenge the concept of the one God who is open to personal communication as being a too anthropomorphic concept of transcendence. Hindus, on the other hand, cannot accept the uniquely qualified revelation of this God in the history of Israel and the Church. They see biblical revelation on an equal level with other appearances of God in this world. In response to the experience of militant Islam spreading terrorism in the name of this one God, monotheism is being perceived increasingly as incompatible with globalization, given its absolutist claims and inclination toward the use of violence.²⁰

Finally, a subtle criticism of monotheism is being voiced from a quite different source. The Christian theological perception of God is meeting disapproval not only from Muslims but also from Jews. The Christian emphasis on Jesus Christ as both God and Man is perceived as undermining the oneness of God. Objections expressed by some Jews to the thesis in *Dabru Emet*, a document published in the year 2000, in which Jewish scholars state that Jews and Christians worship the same God, bear out this observation. These voices revived the ancient accusation

that Christians should be considered idolaters by Jews because of their Christology and faith in the Trinity.²¹

In the debate around monotheism the question of God needs to be dealt with further, particularly in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. Christian theology needs to look at rabbinic tradition and Jewish philosophy and to interpret anew the Christian connection to the Jewish understanding of God's appearance on Mount Sinai, whose face is hidden, whose name is not to be pronounced, but who, because of God's commandments in the Torah, is very much present. Christianity needs to regain, for example, the lost theology of God's name, and even more, a Christology of “the Word was made flesh” (Jn 1:14). It needs to connect its faith in the incarnation of God to God's gift of the Torah: not God who became man without mediation but God whose Word was made flesh.²² This is the only way to connect Christian belief in to the Hebrew Bible and to Jesus' own Jewish world. Only by presenting the appearance of Christ in relation to God's history with the Jewish people – which includes God's radical revelation amidst the Jewish people – can Christian faith in the Trinity as a mediation of God within the world be adequately represented. We come to understand

¹⁹ Marquard Odo, *Zukunft braucht Herkunft. Philosophische Essays*, (Stuttgart 2003).

²⁰ Jan Assman, in scientific discourse, started the debate about monotheism and violence in his *Moses der Ägypter, Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* (München, Wien, 1998), and in *Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt, Wiener Vorlesungen im Rathaus*, 116 (Wien 2006). See also: Walter Dietrich und Moisés Mayordomo, *Gewalt und Gewaltüberwindung in der Bibel* (Zürich, 2005); Peter Walter, ed., *Das Gewaltpotential des Monotheismus und der dreieine Gott*, QD 216 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 2005).

²¹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, et al, eds., *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000). Further publications: Rainer Kampling und Michael Weinrich, eds., *Dabru emet – redet Wahrheit. Eine jüdische Herausforderung zum Dialog mit den Christen*, (Gütersloh 2003); Erwin Dirscherl und Werner Trutwin, eds., *Redet Wahrheit – Dabru emet. Jüdische-christliches Gespräch über Gott, Messias und Dekalog*, (Münster 2004).

²² On recent discussion on incarnation theology: Helmut Hoping und Jan-Heiner Tüek, eds., *Streitfall Christologie. Vergewisserungen nach der Shoah*, QD 214, (Freiburg Basel Wien 2005); Jean-Bertrand Madragule Badi, *Inkarnation in der Perspektive des jüdisch-christlichen Dialogs*, (Paderborn München Wien Zürich 2006); Hans Hermann Henrix, “Jesus Christus im jüdisch-christlichen Dialog“ in *Stimmen der Zeit* 1 (2006): 3-56; “Jesus Christus und das Judentum“ in *Communio* 36 (März/April 2007): 59-171.

how Trinity can be understood as a mysticism of monotheism.²³

With this Christian self-confirmation of monotheism in mind, it is possible to face the modern appeal of myths and spiritual experience. In this personal and historical approach to God and to mysticism, humans are not made gods nor is God naively made human. Rather, God's will to connect with Jews and through Christ with Christians, determines the relationship between God and humanity. It maintains the freedom of both while breaking down totalitarian conformity to the laws of the world and nature. Therefore, it is so important that in the language of the covenant that comprises personal freedom, free will, and decision, a locus of encounter with God is maintained. This religious language supports human understanding when speaking of God, more than the language of physics which characterizes God as power, energy, and light because physical reality is opened up. Of course, the psychological and the gender-defined distortions of God can go along with personal talking to God, especially when God is addressed as Father or King. Such personal communication with God must be balanced by apophatic discourse. Particularly in this respect Christians should engage the Jewish reflections on the sanctification of God's name,²⁴ the rabbinic interpretations of divine image and medieval Jewish philosophy's attempts to offer attributes of action to God without describing God's essence, remain waiting for a Christian confrontation.²⁵ Should this monotheism not be

unilaterally accepted by the faithful, and not abused in order to attain one's own political aims, only then can monotheism show its universal and humane image. In the God of the Bible is the voice of justice raised, without which a globalized world cannot be achieved.

The Story of Salvation Newly Understood

Many of our contemporaries find a way to God through experiencing nature or via a personal search for the meaning of life or for happiness. From this current re-spiritualization of society emanates an approach to religion that hardly concerns itself with any ethical implications. The God of the Bible is also the God of creation revealed in the cosmos. God is also present for any human being, especially when they suffer and are in need. No doubt! But the primary experience of Israel consists of its liberation from injustice and slavery and in its finding its home as a nation. So God is manifest also in historical events. For Judaism, this special experience is considered a pivotal point, as it reinforces her belief in the special covenant between God and the Jewish people. This is recorded as the Word of God in the Torah from Exodus through Deuteronomy. Israel's prophets and teachers have always challenged their people live up to the ethical obligations of the covenant, thus being a light for all the nations and giving witness to the covenant (Is 49:6).

For Christians, this theological tradition led to a belief in a history of salvation. Through God's action in Israel and through Jesus Christ, this covenant is offered through the Church to all people. All of humanity is to be included in this history of salvation through the covenant with God. However, just like monotheism, so too this understanding of the history of salvation is facing criticism. First of all, we must remember that God presides in the world not only through historical revelation

²³ Bernhard Klappert, "Die Trinitätslehre als Auslegung des Namens des Gottes Israels" in *Evangelische Theologie* 62 (2002): 54-72; "Hat das Neue Testament das 1. Gebot übertreten und Christus vergottet?" in Magdalene L. Frettlöh und Hans P. Lichtenberger, eds., *Gott wahr nehmen. Festschrift für Christian Link*, (Neukirchen 2003) 97-126.

²⁴ Verena Lenzen, *Jüdisches Leben und Sterben im Namen Gottes*. Studien über die Heiligung des göttlichen Namens (Kiuddusch HaSchem), (Zürich 2002).

²⁵ An overview of talmudic and theological-philosophical thinking in Judaism is offered in Karl Erich Grözinger, *Jüdisches Denken. Theologie, Philosophie,*

Mystik. Vom Gott Abrahams zum Gott des Aristoteles, I (Frankfurt a.M., New York, 2004), 221-614.

and through the Church. As Creator and Leader of the whole world, God's spirit is also present in non-Christian cultures and other religions.²⁶ Secondly, the classical, salvation story model was refuted because it replaced God's covenant with Israel with God's new covenant with the Church, relegating the religious importance of Judaism to that of a negative foil for the Christian story of salvation. But as many Christian churches have now accepted, the history of God with the people Israel endures, and its covenant remains valid.²⁷ Moreover, since the founding of the State of Israel, Christians can no longer deny the political presence of the people of Israel in world history. Thirdly, the belief in the Christian story of salvation in the nineteenth century led to theologies of history which claimed to know the universal meaning to history with God managing individual nations as well as world history. The most well known representative of this view was Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whose theory was, however, refuted in the twentieth century since it served to justify European colonialism instead of affirming God's reign over history.

What is the present state of the concept of the God of history? Has the idea of the history of salvation become completely outdated?²⁸ Hopefully, we have been cured of our hubris and narcissism which underpinned our attempts to explain history as a whole and to perceive God's creation only from our own religious community's perspective. But, unfortunately,

²⁶ See *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom). These three Council documents are consequences of the conviction that the Spirit of God works even beyond the limits of the Church.

²⁷ Hubert Frankemölle, *Der ungekündigte Bund?* QD 172 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1998).

²⁸ With respect to the term "history of salvation" in relation to the question of the sense of history in general, refer to the essays of Golo Mann and Karl Rahner under the main title "World History and Salvation History" in Franz Böckle und Franz-Xaver Kaufmann et al., eds., *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, 23 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1982) 87-125.

in the process the baby has been thrown out with the bathwater: few dare to ask for evidence of God's will and actions in historical events. Following the breakdown of right- or left-wing narrative traditions, even political theologies that traditionally did question the meaning of history, now face difficulties.²⁹ However, the God of history prohibits a surrender to the complete privatization of faith, reducing it to inner experience alone. God obliges us to formulate the public relevance of faith: in view of the systemic poverty in a globalized world, as taught by Liberation Theology; in view of Islam's public and political demands; in view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which despite all secular points of contentions has in the background a biblical story; in view of the extensive history of the Jewish people that lives to this day nourished by the Sinai Covenant.

Christian theology is challenged to understand through faith the present events of history, particularly with regard to Israel-Palestine.³⁰ The interpretations of the creation and the existence of Israel must not be left to fundamentalist movements. These movements extract certain biblical passages and themes, considering them timeless principles of history, inserting them into political contexts, without any respect for actual historical developments and changes. Furthermore, we must withstand the temptation to think that we have come to the end of all time. We as human beings do not really know the course of history; we have a tendency to become utterly ruthless when we bind future visions to the end of all time.

²⁹ It is interesting to note that it is instead leftist political theology that was highly inspired by biblical and Jewish history. The liberation theology of South Africa turned to the Old Testament and was attracted by socialist-marxist ideas, while the political theory in Europe was confronted with the Shoah and its message about faith. Leonardo Boff and Johann-Baptist Metz can be mentioned here as representatives of this theory.

³⁰ For an excellent overview about the theological interpretation of the Near-East conflict, the existence of the State of Israel and the significance of the country of Israel see Roland Deines, "The Importance of the Country of Israel from a Christian Perspective" in *Judaica*, 4 (2006) 309-330.

What path then remains open? With respect to rabbinic interpretations Christians should deal with the enduring value of the Hebrew Bible's "Promised Land" which the Jewish people legitimately invoke to this day. They are to be considered alongside other instructions of the Torah, above all the ethos of justice, and should not be identified directly with present-day, political aspirations, despite evidence for their correlation. Furthermore, Christians must be cautious regarding eschatological views in relation to promises of the land, as well as to all of history. In this very complicated environment, the Gospel of Jesus about the Kingdom of God, the voices of patristic authors and the New Testament texts, and the voice of the contemporary Palestinian church, all also have to be taken into account.³¹ In any case, the Christian Church has to face a totally new challenge it cannot avoid, if it is to take its own conviction seriously regarding the historical significance of the Jewish people alongside the Church and the message of salvation to all the peoples of the world.

The Church as People of God – and Judaism?

This reconsideration of salvation history and the question of the religious significance of the State of Israel are the logical consequences of the renewal of Christian theology. This means that, after Christ, the Church does not simply disinherit and replace Israel, but that the Jewish people remains in an unrevoked covenant with God as a witness of revelation for humankind. Thus, Judaism remains a valid religion alongside Christianity. Although the Church no longer defines itself as *versus Israel*, it considers itself, as expressed by the last Council, as "People of God." In doing so it assumes an identity by which Judaism expresses its special connection to God.³² Naturally, the God of the Bible claims to be God for all people

³¹ See Naim Stifan Ateek, *Recht, nichts als Recht! Entwurf einer palästinensisch-christlichen Theologie*, (Fribourg, Brig, 1990).

³² *Lumen Gentium*, 2, §9-17; cf. Ex 19 :5f; 1 Pt 2 :9.

and every nation. However, according to that revealed in the history of salvation, it is only the Church and the Jewish people who stand next to each other as the special property and special people of God. The question of the specificity of their relationship must be posed here.³³ Is the people of God twofold? Do the Sinai covenant and the covenant of Golgotha, which founded the two communities, form two parallel covenants, or are they only two aspects of the same bond?³⁴ What is the meaning of being "People of God" in the Jewish and the Christian contexts? What are the roots of the Church in the Old and in the New Testament? What does it mean for Judaism if the Church considers herself as the fulfillment of biblical history? What do the missions of Christianity and of Judaism have in common and what differentiates them in today's world? Questions and more questions are waiting to be answered!

If Christians really believe that the history of the Jews continues to be guided by God, then this will create conflicts with the ways that Christians have understood the history of the Church. Jewish history must be seen as a continuum through the centuries as well. This will require that the churches incorporate the Jewish way of reading the Bible, thus raising comprehensive questions about the theological meaning of Christian tradition. Even the Talmud and the entire Oral Torah that, according to rabbinic conception, belong to the Sinai covenant, will carry

³³ See Josef Wohlmuth's, *Im Geheimnis einander nahe. Theologische Aufsätze zum Verhältnis von Judentum und Christentum* (Paderborn, München, Wien, 1996), and his *Die Tora spricht die Sprache der Menschen. Theologische Aufsätze und Meditationen zur Beziehung von Judentum und Christentum* (Paderborn, München, Wien, 2002).

³⁴ See John T. Pawlikowski and Hayim Goren Perelmuter, eds., *Reinterpreting Revelation and Tradition: Jews and Christians in Conversation* (Franklin, Wisconsin, 2000); Josef Ratzinger, "Modern Variations of the Concept of the People of God" in *The Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, (Crossroad Press, 1988) 21-28; Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding*, (Paulist Press, 2000).

positive meaning for Christians. By including Jewish scholars in his recently published theological commentaries on the Old Testament, Erich Zenger has laid the groundwork in the field of exegesis. The recent document entitled *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scripture in the Christian Bible* published by the Pontifical Bible Commission in 2001 is another courageous step forward. Once it is acknowledged that Jewish tradition and history are not an alien faith, but vital elements related to the Church, it becomes obvious that this philosophy affects the Church in its entirety, beginning with biblical interpretation, continuing with Christian ethics and liturgy through to systematic theology.³⁵ Today it is of vital importance that Judaism is not seen as the mother religion of Christianity but as its sister religion, as Judaism and Christianity have influenced each other throughout history.

The relationship of Jews and Christians becomes particularly volatile in relation to Christian absolutist claims which imply that humankind's only way to God is through Jesus Christ. (Jn 14:6) How can Jesus' universal claim of salvation be sustained, when confronted with the conviction that the Jews already stand in a covenant with God? Is the Church entrusted with a mission towards the Jews when they already believe in God? Is biblically-based missionary work only aimed at people who have not yet come to know God? What does the claim of the Gospel then represent regarding the Jews? A newly defined differentiation seems to be needed here. This is the only possible way for a serious dialogue in which Christians cannot help but testify for Jesus before Jews, respecting that Jews in turn cannot help but confirm before Christians their adherence to an unsurpassable Torah. The Jewish People and the Church must not merely consider their relationship as complementary

³⁵ Peter Hünemann, ed., *Erneuerung der Theologie. Konsequenzen der wiederentdeckten jüdisch-christlichen Gemeinsamkeiten*, QD 200, (Freiburg Basel Wien 2003).

to each other.³⁶ They are dialectically bound together and mysteriously woven into each other, certainly from a Christian point of view. Believing in the same God and being convinced that God has been revealed to both Jews and Christians, the logical expectation is that, in spite of a certain contradictions, both peoples will grow in their own faith.

The Jewish-Christian relationship would become even more complex if the validity of the so-called messianic Jews were to be acknowledged.³⁷ In a word, for this Jewish group Jesus of Nazareth has a theological meaning, but this group is not willingly dealt with by the established Jewish-Christian dialogue. Neither the Jewish nor the Christian side can afford not to engage in dialogue on this issue in the future if each side wants to avoid becoming locked into an ideological position.

Spirituality of Learning and Working in Community

For Judaism, the gift of the Torah stands at the center of the revelation at Mount Sinai, crystallized in the religious law, the Halakhah. It contains rules for specific conduct in all situations of life as a pillar for governing Jewish identity. This specifically concerns the primacy of ethics and a summons to people towards a responsible personal involvement in a *via activa*. The Jewish philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt

³⁶ See for instance, Franz Rosenzweig's complementary relation of Judaism and Christianity in the third part of his *Die Stern der Erlösung*. (Frankfurt a. M., 1999). This is a valuable project, but it has to be critically completed and corrected by both sides. See also Frank Surall's *Juden und Christen – Toleranz in neuer Perspektive. Der Denkweg Franz Rosenzweigs in seinen Bezügen zu Lessing, Harnack, Baeck und Rosentstock-Huessy* (Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, 2003).

³⁷ Kai Kjaer-Hansen and Bodil F. Skjøtt, *Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregation in Israel 1998-1999. A Survey* (Jerusalem, 1999).

have expressed this in secular language.³⁸ Expressed in religious terms and within the act of profound faith, we can talk about the primacy of conduct, which is to be understood as sanctification of life through observance of the commandments. This spirituality of behavior, that respects God's will and finds God's presence in any situation of life, forms the center of Judaism.³⁹ In order to be able to act in the spirit of God, studying the Torah and the entire tradition is an unchanging prerequisite. Indeed, learning from the Torah is in itself an act of personal religious performance.⁴⁰ Without learning from the Torah, it is impossible to act in the name of God.

The priority of acting, of learning in the company of others, and of inter-subjectivity corresponds to the meaning of community: it is impossible to be a Jew alone. God's covenant on Mount Sinai is a covenant with the people of Israel. Standing opposite God is a collective act into which the individual Jew is registered. There can be no single righteous person, as the life and acts of a single person are always deeply intertwined with the entire group. The individual is always part of a people, a nation, a family, a culture, a language group, a religious community. Ultimately, each member of the group feels part of the community. Thus, nobody can escape the spirit of the age, even if he or she takes an opposing stand. Jewish culture is very well aware of these connections. Ideally, the individual is looked upon as a member of the people for whom he/she feels responsible and lives accordingly, and which gives him/her in turn an essential support to live fully as a Jew. This does not mean that the individuality of each member of the group is

³⁸ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Jenseits des Seins oder anders als Sein geschieht* (Freiburg, München, 1998) and Hannah Arendt, *Vita activa oder vom tätigen Leben* (Zürich, München, 1989).

³⁹ See Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *The Halakic Man*, (Philadelphia, 1983).

⁴⁰ See Norman Lamm, "Torah Lismah – Torah for Torah's Sake" in *The Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries* (Hoboken, NJ, 1989).

sacrificed, as caring for the concrete and physical wellbeing of each is of capital importance.

How does this aspect of Jewish tradition affect Christians? It is evident that one becomes a Christian through faith in God and God's revelation through Christ. It is also obvious that Christianity cannot be limited to ethics, although it is often presented this way. Faith, however, matures only through action. First of all, the way is through Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6), for he is the Halakhah. According to the Jewish paradigm, theology first has to struggle with the form in which the discipleship of Christ can be made accessible to the devout. Christ himself lived according to Halakhah. Christian ethics has to be immersed in the spirituality of action, oriented on the perception of Jesus, the Gospel, and tradition. In comparison, metaphysical and speculative acknowledgment of the existence of God is of secondary importance. Bonding ecclesiastical praxis back to Judaism would establish new priorities, including the restoration of theology as a means of service in Christian life.

Above all, if the Church wants to function in today's world, it needs to think of itself as a minority within a non-Christian society, similar to the historical condition of the Jews. To do this effectively requires that it consider its concept of tradition, ponder its collective and ecclesial identity in an open society, and respect the concrete and apparent manifestation of other faiths.⁴¹ The only way to be able to strongly influence society with a rich tradition and also to transmit faith to the next generation is through a spiritual deep-rootedness in history. Unless religions of revelation live collectively within historical time, they betray their identity since their existence derives from the action of

⁴¹ Regarding the theological concept of tradition, see Gershom Scholem, *Tradition und Kommentar als religiöse Kategorien im Judentum*, *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XXXI (Zürich, 1963) 19-48, and Bernhard Waldmüller, "Erinnerung und Identität. Beiträge zu einem theologischen Traditionsbegriff" in *Auseinandersetzung mit der memoria passionis bei J. B. Metz*, *Studien zur Traditionstheorie*, 7 (Münster, 2005).

God within history, and not merely from experiences of transcendence in the here and now. The necessity to unlock its own sources has nothing to do with the Church escaping from society.

This obligation towards sacred acts in all fields of life, transmitted by fellow human beings, but ultimately originating in God, affects individual devotion.⁴² Prayers, for example, are always open to the larger community of believers, reminding us again and again of God's acts in history, where every person who prays stands before God. In Christian prayer, the immediate appeal to God is always transmitted through Jesus, and through biblical texts the individual feels part of the history of generations.⁴³ In particular, the Christian connection to Judaism, especially through its irreversible basis in the Old Testament, is of contemporary importance regarding the Christian dialogue with the mystic religions of Asia. For example, the concrete history of salvation in the entire Bible, not only the coming of Jesus, but the progress of Jewish as well as Christian history, have to be brought into consideration in the process of acculturation of the Indian sub-continent. Learning from the Holy Books and regarding interpersonal relations as occasions of encountering God may to be regarded as essential for an internal mystical experience, so much praised in the Asian context. Accepting and returning love in the inter-subjective field from one human being to another, or from one human being to God, represents insight conveyed by the biblical message. Weaving this kind of religion into the inter-religious dialogue, into the

⁴² Willi Lamberti und Melanie Wolfers, eds., *Dein Angesicht will ich suchen. Sinn und Gestalt christlichen Betens*, (Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 2005).

⁴³ In this context, the Spanish mysticism of the sixteenth century has special significance, for it refers methodologically to biblical texts which are historical in nature. The *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola may serve as an example.

globalizing process and into the "dispersion of the religious,"⁴⁴ is a task for Christians and Jews alike.

Understanding the World from the Point of View of the Other

Probably the most important contribution of Judaism to Christianity is the concept of the Other. In biblical monotheism, God is perceived as the Other who must not be represented in any form, not even by visual symbols. This God who is actually quite different from what people imagine, in the specifically Jewish perception is at the same time very near, standing in the world by the side of the human Other. The Jewish people, through the covenant on the Mount Sinai, are set apart from all the other peoples, in order to function as God's special possession. The fact of being "the chosen People," as this is also called, is by no means a privilege. On the contrary, it is an obligation to represent this Otherness in the world, and thereby call attention to God. (cf. Ex 19:5; Dt 7:6ff) A special compassion should also be granted to the other, the stranger and the poor. (Ex 22:20-26; Lv 19:33f; Dt 24:17ff) A perception of reality and ethical conduct are thereby formed. The Israelites are called upon time and again to remember that they were at one time slaves and strangers in a foreign land (Ex 23:9).

Furthermore, the Jewish people have slowly learned not to peg their identity to the great victories and the triumphs of history. The Torah finds its definite form in the exile in Babylon, while the process of shaping the Talmud as the core oral revelation is set in motion following the destruction of the Second Temple. From the *other* historical perspective, God is manifested as Master of the Universe. In the final phase of redacting

⁴⁴ Hans-Joachim Höhn, "Auf dem Weg in eine postsäkulare Kultur? Herausforderungen einer kritischen Phänomenologie der Religion" in Paul M. Zulehner, ed., *Spiritualität – mehr als ein Megatrend* (Ostfildern, 2004), 18-23.

the Talmud in the sixth and seventh century (CE), this awareness of the Other reaches a particularly profound expression in a culture of learning, struggle, and conflict, where differing opinions in a continuous discourse are preserved and respected.⁴⁵ Listening to the Other is an ideal that even in Jewish life is often not respected. It remains a great challenge, but one with considerable appeal in our time.

Thinking with the Other and thinking from the point of view of the Other is expressed in biblical texts in connection with the core experiences of siblings, as before God all men and women are brothers and sisters. As James Alison has pointed out, in monotheism the basic question regarding the mother-child relationship towards the father in view of the Oedipus complex and intergenerational conflict is not the paramount problem, but rather siblings or partners living together in relationships of fundamental equality before God.⁴⁶ Perceiving the other as brother or sister is the challenge, as found in the Old Testament: from Cain and Abel (Gn 4), through Joseph and his brothers, up to the sons of David. In the New Testament, the brother constellation is found in the parables of Jesus (e.g., Lk 15:11-32) and the experience of Jesus and his male and female disciples. When another becomes my enemy, the experience of the Other becomes extreme, expressed in “love your enemies” as found in Mt 5:44f. But the Other does not only appear as a special threat, as an enemy; the Other can also appear as like oneself. This twin constellation theme appears several times in the Bible,

as in the Jacob and Esau story (Gn 27-36), so paradigmatic for the Jewish-Christian relationship.

The relationship between Judaism and Christianity as constituted in late antiquity and as it took up its final form in the religion of revelation up to the present day,⁴⁷ is similar to a constellation of twins that, unfortunately, has all too often turned into animosity. Today it has become of paramount importance for both parties, but especially for Christians, to arrive at a hermeneutics of difference that teaches us self-understanding coming from a consciousness of the Other, without offending the other.⁴⁸ Under such circumstances, the Church builds up its identity less by separation and exclusion, as communities and individuals usually do, but rather it a new culture that appreciates the otherness of the Other in the established categories of difference. Acceptance of the Other is an expression of a culture of respect, justice, and love for all. It is a contribution to the most difficult task in the life of any human being: how to deal with the other. With its bond to Judaism on the one hand, and the painful event of the crucifixion on the other (1 Cor 1:18-31), sacramental signs offered by God, Christianity must set an example of this culture of respect, justice, and love for all humankind.

In other terms, this reference to the Other and to the stranger leads to a concrete situation where the Church, in addition to its mission, also enters into a dialogue in which it listens to the Other, including an assessment of the relationship of Christians

⁴⁵ See Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 145-225. Boyarin discusses this culture of opening towards the Other but above all towards the Torah as God's Word, belonging to the generation of the *saboraim* and their internal discourse. He sees it as having an apophatic character: “The Bavli's practice of refusal of such closure reveals the strange and more surprising epistemology, one that I would characterize as virtually apophatic with respect to the divine mind, its text and intentions for practice, as well.” (p.152)

⁴⁶ James Alison, *Faith beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (London, 2001), 47ff; 74-77.

⁴⁷ Naturally, Christianity's connection to the Bible and its history is quite different than that of Judaism, its older brother. However, as religions related to the Torah, Judaism and Christianity represent together two new interpretations of the older history of the Bible. Both remain in a coherent continuity of interpretation.

⁴⁸ In *Humanismus des anderen Menschen* (Hamburg, 1989) Emmanuel Levinas has paradigmatically presented a foundation for this in the actual discourse of Being facing the Other.

to non-Christians.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, this dialogue leads the Church to the core of her own initial 'good news.' Christianity has its origin in Jesus Christ, in the Other, the Jew, the outcast, the stranger, the misjudged, and the crucified. Indeed, the God of the Bible is not a God of historical triumphalism. Instead, God has resurrected this unimportant, itinerant Jewish preacher of Nazareth and placed him at God's right hand (Acts 2:22-36). Christian identity emerges through the failure of the Messiah, where God is not concealed through a human act of heroism.⁵⁰

Here, an "other logic" is manifested, the logic of the cross, according to which Jesus, the victim of human violence, does not turn to revenge. Redeemed by God, he gives mercy and forgiveness. Jesus, the Other, the victim of hostility, mistreated by his enemies, transforms all hate and hostility into love.⁵¹ In this story, YHWH is revealed as the God of true life. This way, Christians, together with their Jewish brothers and sisters, cannot but bear witness to God.

⁴⁹ Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue/Congregation for the Evangelisation of Nations, ed., *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientation on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, Vatican City, 1991.

⁵⁰ Christian M. Rutishauser, "Jesus von Nazareth und Sabbatai Zwi, oder: Das Scheitern des Messias" in *Gregorianum*, 87/2 (Rome, 2006): 324-346.

⁵¹ The basic theme for the theological writings of James Alison deals with the topic of victims of violence who forgive while encountering the manifestations and effects of violence. He uses the mimetic theory of René Girard to re-interpret the biblical texts, particularly those of the New Testament.