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New Testament Aspects of Trinitarian Language

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1. Preliminaries

[...]

It seems to me that it is time and indispensable to describe the relationship of the Church to Israel in a trinitarian perspective.* And here it is necessary to discover and make conscious the Church's bond with Israel especially and precisely in the specific Christian, the trinitarian way of speaking about God. If this does not happen, the Church would ultimately not see the relationship between Christians and Jews as being crucial as it is. If the relationship with Israel is only anchored in the first article of the Christian creed (about God as Father and Creator), only vaguely hinted at in the second article (about Jesus, the Son) and not mentioned at all in the third (about the holy Spirit) as is the case in a creed frequently used on Israel Sunday¹ - which is an improvement compared with the creeds of the ancient Church that do not mention Israel at all - then the description of the "specific Christian" content of the creed shows no relation to Israel and can continue to be used to describe Christianity as superseding Judaism or even contradicting it. [...]

The ancient Church had a tradition in which the three persons of the Trinity are mentioned side by side, as we also know it from the creeds used in our worship services. There is, however, another tradition that by the use of prepositions assigns a relation: *to* the Father we come and pray *through* the Son *in* the holy Spirit. These relations still appear vaguely in new text proposals for the creed, where the second and third prepositions are exchanged: the triune God acts *in* Jesus *through* the holy Spirit.

[...] New trinitarian formulations have to take up or at least allude to statements of the tradition. Even if the intention is not to formulate a complete creed, it is imperative to take up statements from the tradition in any new wording and not only incorporate a reflection of the historical experience that has newly been detected in light of the Scriptures. If the newly detected insight is rooted in the trinitarian tradition, it can not as easily again be leveled and downplayed in its significance but, on the contrary, will be seen in the context of tradition and be brought to light together with the tradition.

[...] What is it actually that compels Christians to speak of God in a trinitarian way, and is there an impetus for this in the New Testament?

2. What Impetus does the New Testament give Christians to speak of God as Trinity?

I will begin with a thesis:

Christians must speak of God as Trinity because they are not - unlike Jews - innately, as it were, related to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but we are related to God through Jesus Christ.

This thesis has to be justified in constant consultation with the New Testament.

Christians are, as their name indicates, related to "Christ." According to Acts 11:26 this name was originally given to them in Antioch and from the outside. The term used here is *christianoí*, in Latin *christiani*, and in German one would then translate *Christianer* which can be explained from its use in the Latin language. Compound words derived from the name of a man, with the added suffix *-iani*, were extremely common and they always describe the political supporters of the man whose name is used. The word form "Christiani" then reflects the perception of the Roman provincial authority of Antioch at the time, when these people began to gather. Roman authorities were interested in nothing else but the potential threat to political order that might be posed by such gatherings. Later on, the people who were called "Christiani" made this name their own. 1Petr 4:12-16 shows, in a martyrological context, how that happened: Christians who were accused of being Christians, had to appear in court and were convicted because they were thought capable of terrible offenses. Facing this situation, the author of the letter warns his Christian readers that no one should be a murderer, thief or other evildoer. But if the only indictment is that one is a Christian, then one should not be ashamed.

That the designation "Christiani" and not "Jesuiani" was used is an indication that those who were called Christians must have talked more about Christ as their crucial reference, than about Jesus. For them it was - unlike for the authorities -- not just a name. They must have been aware of the titular significance of this term, which means the Anointed One, the Messiah. This was Jesus for them, although in the eyes of others he had obviously failed by ending up on the cross. He was Christ for them, because they believed that God had eschatologically raised him as a new creation. This is the foundational statement of the New Testament, "God has raised Jesus from the dead." Thus the reference to Christ is, at the same time, the reference to God who is acting in him and through him. This then is the starting point of all trinitarian language that points to him: it is to make clear that whoever relates to Jesus Christ relates to God himself. ²

In John 14:1 Jesus says in a parallel wording, "believe in God and believe in me!" This invitation does not state a juxtaposition, as a faith related to different persons. Anyone who trusts, believes in Jesus, trusts in Israel's God who is present in him. The linguistic juxtaposition of trust in God and trust in Jesus has a biblical analogy in Exodus 14:31. Here it is stated, after the people of Israel had experienced the rescue through the Sea of Reeds: "And they believed in Adonai and Moses, his servant." At the beginning of the verse it is said: "Thus Israel saw the great work which Adonai had done in Egypt." That they acknowledged "God's great work" in these events is an expression of their faith. In a seemingly hopeless situation they had trusted the word of Moses as God's word to walk through the sea and experience redemption. The belief in Moses is nothing other than the belief in the God who is acting through him.

The midrash takes up Exodus 14:31 and sings the Song of Faith:

" 'And they believed in Adonai and Moses, his servant' (Exodus 14:31). If they believed in Moses, how much more in Adonai. This has come about to teach you that all who believe in the faithful shepherd are those who believe the word of the One who spoke and the world came into existence. The following word is similar, 'And the people spoke against God and against Moses' (Numbers 21:5). If they spoke against God how much more against Moses. But this has happened to teach you that all who talk against the faithful shepherd, are those who talk against the One who spoke and the world came into existence. . . . And so you find that Abraham, our father, inherited this world and the next only through the faith with which he believed in Adonai. For it is said: 'And he believed in Adonai, and he thought it to him as righteousness "(Genesis 15:6) . . ." ³

This experience of Israel's saving faith stands behind the double invitation of John 14:1, "Believe in God and believe in me!" In regard to Jesus it is condensed in the confession that God has raised him from the dead. This confession speaks about "the strong hand of God" that did not allow the

execution of Jesus to be the final word about him. Thus John testifies to the God of Israel as the God who in Jesus' death on the cross enters the deepest humiliation and overcomes it. Faith can hold on to him; he can be trusted.

Jesus expresses this even more emphatically in John 12:44, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me." It is not about an isolated belief in Jesus, about a Christology of its own standing, but about the recognition of God's presence in Jesus. If one wants to talk exclusively, then only in such a way that the faith that looks to Jesus fastens itself exclusively on God, who is recognized as acting through him. Whoever believes in Jesus, does not believe in him, but in God. John takes up the notion of the messenger by showing that Jesus speaks of God as the one who sent him. The messenger is not identical with the one who sends him but in the execution of the mission he stands in his place. The distinction between the messenger and the one who sends him, the distinction between God and Jesus can be highlighted and clarified through John 12:44 by showing that this verse is not reversible. Jesus could not say, "Whoever believes in the one who sent me, does not believe in him who sent me, but in me." Let me repeat: when looking at the relationship between God and Jesus, it is necessary to stress that the person who gets involved with Jesus trusts in God himself. It is in this way that the New Testament marks the starting point and purpose of all trinitarian statements. ⁴

However, everything said so far is only "binitarian," so to speak. That one must speak in a trinitarian way arises from the simple fact that Jesus is not directly accessible to us. He was executed on the cross and died. After the resurrection, to which the witnesses testify, he is no longer present in the same way as he was before. Miriam of Magdala, for example, had to learn this in the story of John 20:11-18. When she spoke to the person whom she thought to be the gardener, and Jesus addressed her by her name, she recognized him and wanted to resume the old, familiar connection with him. Yet she had to learn to let go of Jesus as she had known him before his death, in order to see him present in a new way. After Good Friday and Easter, Jesus is present mainly in his word. It is the holy Spirit who causes the words he spoke in the past to come alive for the present time. The holy Spirit is the power of repetition, who repeats Jesus' works and brings them back again through the remembering witness of his disciples and their disciples and in the remembering witness of his learning community. Thus the Spirit is described in John's Gospel as the "Spirit of truth", the "Adviser" (John 14:16-17.25-26; 15:26-27). Because Jesus will be present in the Spirit, he can, in taking leave of his disciples, promise them peace (14:27) and encourage them not to be alarmed and not to despair (14:1.27; cf. 16:33), and promise them joy (16:22). As the Spirit repeats Jesus and thereby calls him back again, so God is present who acts through him. This Spirit, who is and gives the power of repetition, is of course the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead (cf. Romans 8:11).

The Spirit returns the words of Jesus to their ever current effectiveness. He does not do this in literal repetition. If the words of Jesus have to remain effective in any new situation, they must be adjusted. This need is already expressed in the very different versions of the four Gospels. ⁵

The Spirit who causes Jesus' words forever to be effective, is the Spirit of Israel's God, who acted eschatologically and in new creation in the resurrection of Jesus. In repeating the words of Jesus he makes them effective in calling the nations of the world to Israel's God.

Because the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is believed and understood as the eschatological new creation, the New Testament often makes majestic statements about Jesus. However, what Jesus taught was not new. It may indeed be described entirely with words of the Jewish Scriptures, and it has been in the past and is in the present time therefore also experienced in Israel – without Jesus. But the outreach is now comprehensive. This is the "New" in the New Testament that the peoples of the world are now called to the God of Israel, so that they can experience his kindness and may serve him without having to become Jews. The qualification of the resurrection of Jesus as end-time and the inclusion of the nations of the world constitute the uniqueness of Jesus, also in

comparison with Moses.

This is articulated in 1Corinthians 8:6, when Paul, in opposition to the factual existence of many gods and lords in the world and in opposition to their claims, emphasizes what applies "to us" Christians:

"One God, the Father,
of whom are all things and for him we exist;
and *one* Lord, Jesus Christ,
through whom are all things and through whom we exist. "

The form of this text is an acclamation. Whoever acclaims recognizes power and subordinates him/herself to it. Here God is confessed and acknowledged as the only God and Jesus as the only Lord. Cause and destination relates to God, mediation to Jesus Christ. The acclamation of 1Cor. 8:6 stresses the singleness and uniqueness (the selfness) of God, to whom the Corinthian Gentile believers have come, because God spoke his creative word through Jesus. This action of God is in view, when in addition to God's uniqueness also the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned – and it is obviously not a confession to a second God. The context of 1Cor. 8:6 makes it clear that the acclamation to God who acts in creation and new creation is to be understood as being exclusive. It opposes the power demands of all other gods and lords. Thus this acclamation to the one God, the Father, and to the one Lord, Jesus Christ, can also be understood as a recasting of the "Hear, Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4) under changed circumstances, that is, under the condition that through the proclamation of Christ the emerging communities of Jews and people of the nations experience and understand themselves as new creation. ⁶

3. Considering the Trinitarian Statements

[...]

a) *The God who is faithful to Israel*

We believe in God, "who created heaven and earth." How do we know this? We know it from the first sentence of the Bible, the first sentence of the Old Testament, which had always been the Jewish Bible and is until today, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." Similarly it is stated in praise of God, "who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it" (Isaiah 42:5). But this Creator of the world says, following the same biblical testimony, "But now, says Adonai, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you. O Israel, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'" (Isaiah 43:1). The Creator of heaven and earth, the God of all the world, is not an all-purpose god but the God of Israel. This is in the Jewish Bible always taken as self-evident, so also in the New Testament, and it is often expounded. Terminologically it can be found in three places:

[...] At the end of a summary view of many healing miracles of Jesus it is said about the reaction of the people, "And they praised the God of Israel" – and not Jesus, the man who actually performed the miracles, Matthew 15:29-31. When Zacharias is able to speak again after the birth of his son John, he begins his blessing by saying, "Blessed be Adonai, the God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people," Luke 1:68. When Paul speaks in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia and anchors the events around Jesus in the history of Israel, he begins with the sentence, "The God of this people Israel has chosen our fathers. . . ." (Acts 13:17).

But if God, with whom Christians become related through Jesus Christ, is Israel's God, then God is explicitly determined by his covenantal relationship with Israel; and because he is the "faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love" (Deuteronomy 7:9), he remains so forever. Here we have

neither an absolute God nor an abstract notion of God. The biblical God can never be perceived as apart from his people or divorced from them but only as God of Israel together with his people. This also means, however, that Christians have to describe their own faith experiences, mediated through Jesus Christ, in similar ways. Yet, to identify them as experiences with the God of Israel they need the Jewish witness, for only in the ongoing history with his people God remains recognizable as the God of Israel. As little as Christians have the power of definition for the term "Israel," so little can they describe – or even prescribe to Jews – who Israel's God is. It is up to the life-witness of Judaism to confess the God of Israel. ⁷ That God is recognized as the God of Israel is dependent upon the Jewish witness. As it is said in the midrash, "'And you are my witnesses,' word Adonai's, 'I am God' (Isaiah 43:12). When you are my witnesses, I am God; and when you are not my witnesses, I am, as it were, not God." ⁸ Another midrash speaks about the fact that God's name is often attached to the people Israel: "Rabbi Shim'on ben Jochai has taught: God I am for all who come into the world, but only with my people Israel I have connected my name. I will not be called 'God of all nations, but God of Israel.' God, your God I am." ⁹

As we look to Jesus Christ, while also being aware of the Jewish witness, we discover that the God who meets us in Jesus is the very same of whom Israel witnesses. In order to identify God as Israel's God who proves himself to be our God as well, through Jesus Christ, Christianity is called into a sibling and partner relationship to Judaism.

b) Jesus the Jew

The Gospels depict Jesus as Jew among Jews. Nothing he says or does is unique in a way that it would place him outside of Judaism or that could not be understood within Judaism's framework. Unique is only the testimony about God's action in the crucified Jesus: he raised him from the dead. But whatever is told about Jesus afterwards has more or less strong correlations in the remaining Jewish literature. The assertion of uniqueness is usually based on a lack of knowledge. It would, in contrast, be better to look with curiosity and respect at the Jewish witness in the literature of the rabbinical tradition and pay attention and exercise understanding, rather than remaining ignorant of it or to cluelessly or even maliciously misunderstand it.

According to the testimony of the New Testament, God has not become a human being, so that one could speak of Jesus in general theological-anthropological terms as being the human face of God. The testimony of the New Testament uses more precise language: The Word became flesh (John 1:14). More pointedly one could say: The word of the God of Israel became Jewish Flesh. ¹⁰ Although it is not stated expressively in these terms, incarnation of the word of God has been in Israel since Abraham. ¹¹ It exists in God's unbreakable bond with his people. It is particularly striking in the rabbinic tradition, where God in his presence ¹² is enslaved with his people in each of its exiles. As an impressive example I quote a passage from a midrash: "[A]nd so you will find: As long as the Israelites were enslaved, so was God in his presence, as it were, enslaved with them." This is based on Isaiah 63:8.9, "He became their savior in all their distress [...] but his presence saved them." Continuing it says, "Rabbi Akiva says: If it had not been written as Scripture, it would be impossible to say it: The Israelites talked, as it were, before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'You have redeemed Yourself.' ¹³ And so you'll find: to any place the Israelites where exiled, so was God in His presence, as it were, exiled with them. They were exiled to Egypt, God in His presence with them, for it is said: 'I revealed myself to the family of your ancestor in Egypt' (1Samuel 2:27). They were exiled to Babel, God in His presence with them, for it is said: 'For your sake I was sent to Babel' (Isaiah 43:14). They were exiled to Elam, God in his presence with them, for it is said: 'I will set my throne in Elam' (Jeremiah 49:38). They were exiled to Edom, God in His presence with them. For it is said: 'Who is he who comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson?' (Isaiah 63:1) And when they at one time will come back, God in His presence, as it were, returns with them. For it is said: 'And Adonai, your God will come back from your captivity' (Deuteronomy 30:3). It (the Scripture) does not say: 'He will bring back', but: 'He will come back.'" ¹⁴

What is said about the relationship between God and his people Israel, is in the New Testament concentrated on this one Jewish person who, after all, not lived alone, but in the midst of his Jewish people. We should therefore not look to him with blinders by observing him in isolation, by not seeing anyone else. The unobstructed look at him, rather, frees our vision to see him with his siblings. If it then matters at all "that Jesus Christ was born a Jew" (so Luther in his pamphlet of 1523), we can not perceive him as Jew on his own, but only in the midst of his people. ¹⁵

[...]

c) Through the holy Spirit together with Israel

[...] Those who are called to God through Jesus are made witnesses through the holy Spirit. Israel had already been called earlier to be witness and without reference to Jesus. The holy Spirit seizes, as it were, for God those to whom the Spirit is given and engages them in service. In Acts 10:44-46 the New Testament depicts this context rather vividly in regards to people from the nations. Peter speaks about Jesus and the events that happened to him in the house of the Centurion Cornelius. Listening are Cornelius, his relatives and closest friends. While Peter still speaks the holy Spirit descends on his listeners. The few Jewish believers in Christ who came with Peter are aghast; they hear that as the effect of the Spirit's descending these non-Jews are glossolalizing and praising God.

Accordingly and biblically speaking are "the saints" who have been seized by God through his Spirit and taken into his service. In the same way God has always acted in regard to Israel and has made the Israelites his witnesses. "You shall be holy, for I, Adonai, your God am holy". (Leviticus 19:2). "You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). The latter purpose is interpreted in the midrash: "'And a nation': It (the Scripture), has called it 'nation,' for it is said: 'Who is like your people Israel, is there another nation on earth, etc.?' (2 Samuel 7:23) "'Holy': holy ones and sanctified ones, separated from the peoples of the world and their idols." ¹⁶

In the Jewish tradition faith in God is connected with the gift of the Spirit; ¹⁷ and this gift leads to worship of God. Thus the midrash interprets Exodus 14:31 ("so the people . . . believed in Adonai and in his servant Moses") and what follows Ex 15:1 ("then Moses and the Israelites"): "Great is the faith with which the Israelites believed in Him who spoke and the world was created; because due to the fact that the Israelites believed in Adonai, the Spirit of holiness rested upon them and they sang a song." ¹⁸ The way that is opened through trust in God and then walked in this trust, leads out of oppression. Those who walk this way perceive themselves as destined by God's Spirit. The Spirit who answers to trust in God, is recognized as God's gift. This Spirit articulates the experiences made on the way as worship of God. ¹⁹

As Israel was separated from idols through the Spirit of holiness and thereby became the witness to God's uniqueness, so the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls the nations of the world through the Spirit, given in the end-time, to separate themselves, "to turn to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1Thessalonians 1:9). ²⁰ The ones who are thus added must recognize as the Church of Jesus Christ that they are, together with Israel, part of the community of all saints. So they have to learn to behave as being in a real partnership with Judaism. It is a partnership in the witness of the one God, their Creator, to whom belongs the whole world in all its spheres. Thus it is also a partnership in the shaping of justice in the world. Witnessing has to also be understood in this dimension.

The holy Spirit does not only claim the ones that are called to God and so made holy, but also gives them future by making them "heirs of the promise" – and this also "jointly with Israel," who is already heir of the promise. The New Testament uses the terms "inherit", the "heritage" and the "heirs" in connection with the promise in Hebrews 6:12.17 and Gal 3:18. In view is always the archetypal figure

of Abraham. God has given Abraham his promise in which Abraham puts his trust, a promise that is certain, a promise of a son, of descendants and of land on which his descendants can live, a promise of blessing that shall also reach the nations, who will be blessed when they bless "Abram" (Genesis 12:3) – all in all then a promise of blessing for Israel and the nations.

4. Concluding Remark

Obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, includes keeping the bond with Israel and paying attention to God's faithfulness to his people Israel. When the Church calls its offices, exercises its leadership and fulfills all its other tasks, she has to do so in a way that is compliant with her bond with Israel and in recognition and acceptance of God's faithfulness to his people.

Notes

* The following deliberations take up factually and, for a good part even literally, my contribution: "Das Verhältnis von Christen zu Juden in trinitarischer Perspektive - ein Versuch," in: *Die Gemeinde als Ort von Theologie*. FS Jürgen Seim, hg.v. Katja Kriener u.a., 2002, S. 173-187 (slightly changed in: Klaus Wengst, *Jesus zwischen Juden und Christen. Re-Visionen im Verhältnis der Kirche zu Israel*, ²2004, S. 85-96). ["The Relation of Christians to Jews in a Trinitarian Perspective – an Attempt, in: *The Community as Place of Theology*. FS Jürgen Seim, edited by Katja Kriener et al, 2002, p. 173-187 (slightly changed in: Klaus Wengst, *Jesus Between Jews and Christians. Re-Visions in the Relationship of the Church to Israel*, ²2004, p. 85-96).]

[...]

1. *Protestant Hymn Book, Edition for the Protestant Church in the Rhineland, the Protestant Church of Westphalia, the Church of the Land Lippe*, No. 817.
2. At this point I want to emphatically point to the essay by Jürgen Seim: "Der Gott Israels und der dreieinige Gott oder: Wie sprechen Christen angemessen vom Gott Abrahams, Isaaks und Jakobs? In: *Kirche und Israel* 10 (1995), pp. 43-57 ["The God of Israel and the triune God or: How can Christians speak appropriately about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?"] He presents "the resurrection of Jesus" as "the new element in the faith in God," which led to the doctrine of the Trinity (p. 46). "Faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was broadened to faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead – which in no way opposes the biblical and Jewish faith and tradition." However: "The theological elaboration of this expansion (toward Gentiles) did no longer happen in direct debate with Jewish interlocutors, but with others" (p. 46), that is "in the tension between biblical tradition and Greek philosophy" (pp. 46-47). Thus, "the doctrine of the Trinity represents the effort to prove the biblical tradition about God through the person of Jesus and to assert it within the existing realm of pagan philosophy" (p. 47). Vgl. auch Dietrich Neuhaus, *Ist das trinitarische und christologische Dogma in der Alten Kirche antijudaistisch?* Comp. also Dietrich Neuhaus, "Is the Trinitarian and Christological Dogma in the Ancient Church anti-Judaic?" In *Mit unsrer Macht ist nichts getan . . .* . Dieter Schellong, edited by Jörg Mertin et al, 1993 (pp. 257-272), p. 264: "The development of the doctrine of the Trinity was needed especially to preserve the unity, uniqueness and selfness of God." (p. 264). This thesis is expounded by him on pp. 264-268.
3. *Mechilta de Rabbi Jischmael, Parascha Beschallach (Wajehi) 6* [The trsl. does not have the official English translation of the midrash available and follows therefore the German text of the author.]
4. The doctrine of the Trinity is the intense effort to express the statements of the New Testament about Jesus and the Spirit in their relationship to God in the context of Greek thought. Here an impressive effort was made to think the matter through thoroughly. This part of our own Christian tradition should not be pushed aside carelessly. It deserves further consideration. Hereafter we will consider the trinitarian way of speaking about God by looking back to the New Testament – and thereby to its Jewish context. A rethinking of the doctrine of

the Trinity that respects its reference to Judaism, has been offered by Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Eia, wär'n wir da – eine theologische Utopie*. 1997, pp. 539-577. (Trsl.: A title taken from a Christian hymn: *Oh, that we were there . . . A Theological Utopia*.)

5. That the same must be changed to remain the same in another situation, is impressively shown in the rabbinical tradition by the story of Moses in Rabbi Akiva's house of study (reprinted in Klaus Wengst, *Jesus* (see footnote 1. p. 36f).
6. For more detail see Klaus Wengst, *Jesus* (footnote 1), pp. 71-73.
7. Comp. Michael Wyshogrod, *Gott und Volk Israel. Dimensionen jüdischen Glaubens*, 2001, S. 23 und 24 [*God and the People Israel: Dimensions of Jewish Faith*: "Israel's God has decided to 'couple' his name to the people of Israel." This name "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" - "binds God's identity to the people Israel."
8. Midrash Sifrei D'varim § 346 and parallels in more places. In the Midrasch to Psalm 51:3 David as speaker of Psalm 51:6 in connection with Isaiah 55:4 argues with God that he witnesses to the nations "that You accept those who turn around, and not only I myself but all Israel; for it is said: You are my witnesses, word of Adonai, and my servant whom I have chosen' (Isaiah 43:10)."
9. Rut Rabba, Opening 1.
10. Comp. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV 1, Zurich 1953, p.181: "The word became – not 'flesh', human being, humiliated and suffering human being in any generalized sense, but Jewish flesh."
11. In regard to the relationship of God to Israel Wyshogrod states: God has "gone into the world through a people that he has chosen as his home. Thus, there was a visible presence of God in the universe, first in the person of Abraham and later in his descendants, the people of Israel" (ibid. [Note 7] p. 23). This manner of speaking one might well describe as incarnational." See by the same author, "Incarnation in Jewish Perspective," in: *Evangelische Theologie* 55 (1995), pp. 13-28, especially pp. 22-23, where he says that Judaism is "incarnational" with its concept of God's entrance into the world of humans and that Christianity made "this tendency concrete."
12. With the phrase "God in his presence" I describe the term *sch'chináh* that is used here, which denotes God's dwelling in the midst of his people.
13. That is to say, at the liberation of Israel from Egypt. So he reads and understands 2 Samuel 7:23: "Your people, that you went to redeem from Egypt, a nation and its God."
14. Mechilta de Rabbi Jischmael, Parascha Bo 14. A close parallel can be found in Sifrej Bamidbar, Parascha Beha'alotcha § 84. What is said in Jeremiah 40:1 about the Prophet Jeremiah, that he "was shackled in chains", is according to Lamentations midrash Rabbah, Opening § 34 also "as it were" said about God who, instead of Jeremiah, moves with his people into exile. According to the midrash on the Psalms 1:20 God goes with his people even through hell. In view of the hypostatic talk about God in Judaism – which he briefly outlined (ibid. [Note 6] p. 50f. – Seim notes: "We see that the doctrine of the Trinity stands in biblical and Jewish tradition, that it can at least be better understood through this tradition than through philosophical formulas" (p. 51).
15. During the mass murder of Jewish men, women and children by Germany some Jews have seen in the crucified Jesus their Jewish brother and fellow sufferer. Especially Marc Chagall in his crucifixion images and Hermann Adler in poems have expressed this connectedness of Jesus with his people. See Peter von der Osten-Sacken, "Jesus der Jude. Tendenzen, Gewinn und Grenzen einer neuen Wahrnehmung des Nazareners." In: *Kirche und Israel* 14 (1999), S. 132-147, besonders S. 135-137. [Peter von der Osten-Sacken, Jesus the Jew. Trends, Gain and Limitations of a new Perception of the Nazarene in *Church and Israel* 14 (1999), pp. 132-147].
16. Midrash Mechilta de Rabbi Jischmael, Parascha Jethro (BaChodesch) 2.
17. This connection is also stated by the Apostle Paul, when he tells the Galatians that they had received the Spirit "by believing what you heard" (Galatians 3:2.5).
18. 18 Midrash Mechilta de Rabbi Jischmael, Parascha Beschallach (Wajehi) 6. Similar statements are made a little further in the text.

19. So it is not surprising that elsewhere the holy Spirit is associated with joy: "Rabbi Jonah said: Jonah ben Amitai was one of the pilgrims. He entered the joy of the dip house (on the feast of Tabernacles) and the Spirit of holiness rested upon him - in order to teach you that the Spirit of holiness rests only on a joyful heart" (Jerusalem Talmud, treatise Sukka 5.1).
20. See also 1Peter 2:5.9-10.

Editorial remarks

Prof. Klaus Wengst wrote [the German original](#) of this translation in order to give a theological basis to the proposed amendment of the Protestant Church of Westphalia's constitution. The paragraphs in the German original that directly and only apply to this German Church and the proposed amendment were not included in this translation and are marked by "[...]".

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