God’s Presence in Israel and Incarnation: A Christian-Jewish Dialogue

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A theological exchange between a Catholic and a Jewish theologian on the understanding of incarnation.

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Dialogue

I. Profound Difference and Strong

Connection

Hans Hermann Henrix

"The most profound difference of belief manifests itself in the face of the strong connecting links between Christians and Jews. The Christian belief in Jesus Christ who as a consequence of his crucifixion and resurrection is affirmed and proclaimed, not only as the promised Messiah, but also as the consubstantial Son of God, appears to many Jews as something radically 'unjewish': they see him as an absolute contradiction, if not a blasphemy, to the strict monotheism as it is referred to every day, particularly by devout Jews, in the 'Shema Israel'. The Christian must understand this, even if he himself sees no contradiction to monotheism in the teaching of Jesus, Son of God."[1]

This is how, in their 1980 declaration on the relationship of the Church to Judaism, the German bishops described the proximity between Judaism and Christianity and its limit as far as Christian faith in Jesus Christ is concerned. In so doing, they gave two titles to Jesus Christ: Messiah and Son of God.

Christian-Jewish disagreement is centred on these two Christological titles, which are of unequal significance. The difference in the understanding of Incarnation is more profound than messianic expectation, which is not as central to Judaism as it is to Christianity. A different emphasis is given to the messianic issue in the two traditions. Consequently, the central divergence between Jews and Christians does not lie in the title of Messiah, but rather in Jesus Christ's other title, that of Son of God, and especially regarding God and his presence — in other words, the understanding of God and his presence in history and in the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, the Orthodox Jewish philosopher Michael Wyschogrod can say: "The most difficult outstanding issues between Judaism and Christianity are the divinity of Jesus, the Incarnation, the Trinity, three terms which are not quite synonymous but all of which assert that Jesus was not only a human being but also God. Compared to this claim, all other Christian claims, such as Jesus as the Messiah, become secondary at most."[2]

Jewish Criticism

Christian-Jewish dialogue today has matured and discussions can now take place about God and the Incarnation as a very personal shape of his presence. This has given rise to various Jewish responses and Christian theologians should be aware of several arguments and approaches in the Jewish objection to the Incarnation of the Son of God. One important objection is on the level of (religious) philosophy. The Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, has examined the value of the "idea" of the Incarnation (of the Son) of God and suggested that God's presence in the world would be "too much" for God's poverty and "too little" for his glory, without which his poverty is no abasement. He denies that God can become a "presence" in time and in the world and argues that God remains "Otherness that cannot be assimilated, absolute difference to everything that manifests itself". Consequently, he speaks of "God's original priority or original ultimate validity as regards the world, which cannot receive and shelter him;" thus he "cannot ... become incarnate," cannot "enclose himself in an end, a goal."[3] Another interjection argues a posteriori: Judaism cannot accept the Incarnation of the Son of God because it does not hear this story, because the Word of God as it is heard in Judaism does not tell this story and because Jewish faith does not testify to it.[4] So from the point of view of tradition and history, the Incarnation is not a Jewish topic of discussion. That is why, already in the 30's of the 20th century, Martin Buber spoke of the absence of God's Incarnation as being something specifically Jewish: "the absence of an Incarnation [*Inkarnationslosigkeit*] of the God who reveals himself to the 'flesh'

and who is present to it in a reciprocal relationship" is "what ultimately separates Judaism and Christianity. We 'unify' God by professing his unity in our living and our dying; we do not unite ourselves to him. The God, whom we believe, to whom we are given in praise, does not unite with human substance on earth."[5]

A further objection, as seen by Jews, is that the consequences of Christian belief in the Incarnation have resulted in deepening the antagonism felt by Christians towards Jews.[6]

In Catholic theology, Jewish criticism of the Incarnation of the Son of God is certainly listened to attentively.[7]

When theologians reflect on the possibilities and limits of a Christian reception of these objections, they may do so with reference to the Council of Chalcedon's (451) understanding of Christ and to so-called Chalcedonian hermeneutics. The Council of Chalcedon saw the relationship of "humanity" and "divinity" in Christ as being not mingled and at the same time not separate: in the human countenance of Jesus of Nazareth the divine Word, the divine Son. In Jesus, what is human and what is divine are not mingled with one another and they may not be separated from one another. The famous Conciliar formula says: "Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. . . this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten — in two natures; and we do this without confusing the

two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the 'properties' of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one 'person' and in one reality 'hypostasis'" (DH 301f.)[8] This Conciliar guideline remains important when Christian theology responds to Jewish criticism of the Incarnation of the Son of God as a very concrete and personal shape of God's presence.

Christian Belief in the Incarnation

Christians say in faith, "We believe in the Incarnation, that the Son of God became flesh or became man in Jesus Christ." They consider an intimacy between God and his creature as an event in the history of the world which did not fall to earth like a meteorite, but within a specific history of God's presence in the world, ie., in the encounter between the God of Israel and the people of Israel. This specific presence of God forms a history of encounter and intimacy. In the Hebrew Bible this is described as God's dwelling in or among the people of Israel. "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25: 8). His dwelling designates here a special form of God's presence. It is — as Benno Jacob states in commentary on the book Exodus — "the completion of human beings with His spirit and essence as a representative residing among them."[9] Exactly this

thought developed further in Exodus 29: 42-46 and is concretized in the concept of covenant: "There [the tent of meeting] I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. . . And I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God" (Exodus 29: 43.45). Dwelling among the people of Israel is a consequence of the exodus out from Egypt: so he can be "their God."[10]

When Solomon began building the house of God, the Temple in Jerusalem, God said: "Concerning this house you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you. And I will dwell among the children of Israel" (1 Kings 6: 12f.) God has thus two dwelling places for his intimate presence: the Temple and the people of Israel.[11]

Christian faith dares to state that the event of the Incarnation of the Son of God — Jesus Christ, the one son of the Jewish people as concrete and personal space and place of God's indwelling — brought about change, not only in history, but to history itself. This is expressed in the Gospel according to John in the climactic sentence in New Testament theology: "And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us." This two-fold statement in John 1:14 must be taken entirely seriously: "the Word became flesh" is just as important as "and dwelled among us". According to Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, the testimony about the Word becoming flesh is the same as the testimony about God pitching his tent and his name in the midst of Israel.[12] The

first half of the verse

says in a "Christian" way what the second half says in a "Jewish" way.

During the course of the Church's history, biblical language was

transformed into other categories of speech, so that "Jewish"

categories are in the end expressed "philosophically". The belief that

God, the creator of everything in heaven and on earth, descended

through the Son and that his Son and Word became flesh and man, is very

foreign to the Jewish understanding of God. Israel, in whose midst the

event of becoming flesh and man occurred and from whose midst it went

out towards the nations, did not, on the whole, speak *in this way* about

God's presence or proximity, even though it had — and continues to have

— deep and intimate insights into God's presence and proximity. The

majority of the Jewish people did not hear *this* because the Word of

God, as it understood it, did not tell it this.

Commenting on the presence of God, the Orthodox Jewish scholar Michael

Wyschogrod did not shy away from choosing a phrase to characterize

Judaism, which at first glance seems like the antithesis to what Buber

said about the "lack of Incarnation". The God of Israel is "a God who

enters into the human world and who, by so doing, does not shy away

from the parameters of human existence, including spatiality. It is

true that Judaism never forgets the dialectics, the transcendent God. . .

But this transcendence remains in dialectic tension with the God who

lives with Israel in its impurity (Lev 16:16), who is the Jew's

intimate companion, whether in the Temple of Solomon or in the

thousands of small prayer rooms. . . Thus, Judaism is incarnational — if we

understand this concept as meaning that God enters into the human

world, that he appears in certain places and lives there, so that they thereby become holy." According to Wyschogrod, there are no reasons "within the essence of the Jewish idea of God," which exclude *a priori* God's "appearance in human form".[13]

According to this position, the idea of the Incarnation in general is not antithetical to Judaism.[14]

A Christian Response

What can a Christian say in response to Jewish criticism of the Christian belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ and to the Jewish understanding of God's dwelling among the people of Israel or even to the incarnational self-understanding of a Jewish thinker like Michael Wyschogrod? The answer will not be philosophical but theological. We can begin with Wyschogrod. It was not the victory of a philosophical idea, but rather the free decision of the sovereign God of Israel to take up his dwelling in the one Son of the Jewish people, Jesus of Nazareth, in such a way that we Christians can no longer speak of God without including his relationship to this Son. In our description of God taking up his abode, we cannot come up with a better concept than that the Word or the Son of God became flesh. Here we should again remember the double statement in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelled/lived among us." According to Johannine understanding, the testimony concerning the Word that was made flesh is the same as the testimony regarding God's dwelling or living in Israel. This was the testimony given from the midst of Israel to Christians

from among the Nations, as the free deed of the God of Israel to the Son of the Jewish people, Jesus of Nazareth.

In view of Levinas' objection that the Incarnation is too much for God's poverty and too little for God's glory, the Christian answer consists in the simple und philosophically defenceless counter question: but what if the God of Israel was pleased to enter into a presence or proximity, which in fact does seem to be too much for divine poverty, and to dare a presence, which seems to be too little for God's glory, without which his poverty is no abasement? This is Christian belief. A responsible reflection on this topic prohibits triumphalism, as for example the claim that our belief is better or greater or deeper in comparison with Jews and Judaism. Such a judgement will only be apparent at the end of history, when our faith will be weighed by the Lord of history. May our faith not be timid but humble, without claiming to be better, without being polemical towards the Jewish faith.

Levinas' critical interjection against the idea of "a God man" is part of the uneasiness that found expression in the Middle Ages in the concept of *shittuf*. This concept arose out of the impression that Christian worship of Jesus Christ as the equal Son of God introduced an element of mingling or of a non-divine element into God himself.[15]

Christian theology will not be able to satisfy this Jewish criticism and concern but should be sensitive to the dangers of mingling and fusing the relationship between the human and the divine natures in

Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that shittuf touches on the insight of the Council of Chalcedon when it emphasized the one and same Christ "in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other," and that the Council then reinforced by adding: "The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union." (DH 302) In his Christology Walter Cardinal Kasper emphasized that Chalcedon unambiguously held on to the statement "that God and man do not form a natural symbiosis. In the Incarnation, God does not become a principle within the world; he is neither made into a spatial reality nor into one of time. God's transcendence is upheld as much as is the human person's independence and freedom."[16]

The Council of Chalcedon expressed a sensitivity that does not do away with the Jewish concern, but that does indicate something that is objectively related: it does not mean some being in between that is formed by mingling the divine and the human, but rather, the one and same Christ "in two natures that are not mingled."

A Jew as the Incarnation of the Son of God

Michael Wyschogrod linked Christian understanding of Incarnation with the demand that Jesus not be separated from the Jewish people. The vigour of Christian replacement theology demonstrates that this did not

happen often enough. The same danger arises when the Incarnation is spoken of in a way that makes the Son of God in Jesus Christ into a "human being *in abstracto*, in general and in a neutral way." The Son of God, God's Word, became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth; he did not become a human being *in abstracto*, in general or in a neutral way. Rather, he became Jewish flesh, a Jew, the son of a Jewish mother, and as *such* he became a concrete human being.

The fact that the Son of God became a Jew is foundational for Christian theology. The concreteness of the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ has yet to be taken seriously in Christian theology. Several documents of the Church's magisterium have touched on this topic in the last decades. Pope John Paul II reflected deeply on the concrete reality of the Incarnation of the Son of God in his many statements concerning the relationship of the Church to Judaism. On April 11, 1997, he received the Pontifical Biblical Commission in audience, and in his address spoke of the New Testament's inseparable link with the Old Testament and Jesus' human identity. By emphasizing that Jesus became a Jew, he described the Incarnation of the Son of God as follows: "Jesus' human identity is determined on the basis of his bond with the people of Israel, with the dynasty of David and his descent from Abraham. And this does not mean only a physical belonging. By taking part in the synagogue celebrations where the Old Testament texts were read and commented on, Jesus also came humanly to know these texts; he nourished his mind and heart with them. . . Thus he became an authentic son of Israel, deeply rooted in his own people's long

history. . . To deprive Christ of his relationship (with the Old Testament) is therefore to detach him from his roots and to empty his mystery of all meaning."[17]

In Christian-Jewish dialogue today there are those who wish to emphasize the historical burden of guilt and failure of the Christians and the Church rather than discuss the teachings of and between Jews and Christians. Even if one agrees with this thesis, questions of faith remain and for Christians faith depends on the understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as Christ. If one turns to this most difficult issue in Christian-Jewish relations, one must face Jewish criticism of the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. It is in response to this criticism that Christian belief in the Incarnation can be seen more clearly. Jewish-Christian conversation about the understanding of God and his presence may result in an unexpected proximity. The Jewish understanding of God's presence in the world can shed light on and make incarnational thinking fruitful. That is a comforting experience in the theology and dialogue of our time.

Translated by Sr. Dr. Katherine Wolff NDS, Abu Gosh/Israel

II. God's Presence in Israel and the Incarnation

Edward Kessler

One of the certain facts about Jesus was that he was a Jew. He was a child of Jewish parents, brought up in a Jewish home and reared among Jewish traditions. Throughout his life, Jesus lived among Jews and his followers were Jews.

No other Jew in history has rivalled Jesus in the magnitude of his influence. The words and deeds of Jesus the Jew have been, and are, an inspiration to countless millions of men and women. Strange, is it not, that Jews have given little attention to the life and teaching of this outstanding Jew? Yet, this is true because the Christian followers of Jesus came to cherish beliefs about his life, which no Jew could hold.

When the Church persecuted Jews in an effort to convert them, Jewish indifference to Jesus turned to hostility. It is a sad fact of history that the followers of this great Jew have brought much suffering upon the Jewish people, so that for centuries it was very hard for any Jew even to think of Jesus without difficulty. Up until recently, most Jews have chosen not to think of him at all.

Now we are witnessing a significant change and although Jewish indifference to Jesus has not by any means disappeared, the signs are encouraging.

Jesus and his family would have been observant of Torah, paid tithes, kept the Sabbath, circumcised their males, attended synagogue, observed purity laws in relation to childbirth and menstruation, kept the dietary code — one could go on. While the Gospels record disputes about Jesus' interpretation of a few of these, the notion of a Christian Jesus, who did not live by Torah or only by its ethical values, does not fit historical reality.

There is no official Jewish view of Jesus but in one respect Jews are agreed in their attitude towards Jesus. Jews reject the tremendous claim, which is made for Jesus by his Christian followers — that Jesus is the Lord Christ, God Incarnate, the very Son of God the Father. On that belief, Jews and Christians must continue to respectfully differ. Jews believe that all share the divine spirit and are stamped with the divine image and no person — not even the greatest of all people — can possess the perfection of God. No one can be God's equal.

Dr Henrix is correct, therefore, when he indicates that for Jews, the doctrine of Jesus Christ as Son of God or as 'the incarnate Word of God' exceeds the limits of Judaism, even though we can acknowledge it develops central Jewish themes. The concept of incarnation is generally viewed as one of the main dividing lines between Judaism and Christianity, particularly the understanding that nothing less than the actuality of divine love, wisdom, self-expression is mediated through Christ, which enables humanity to participate in the divine life.[18]

Yet whilst there is this divide between, this does not mean the topic should be put to one side. There is benefit in discussing this topic together for in so doing we may understand each other a little better and also discover certain commonalities, shared features, that we did not realize exist. For Jews, one way to approach the Christian understanding of incarnational Christology is to view this alongside the Jewish insistence on God being with his people. The term, Shekinah, is the closest Jewish analogue to Incarnation: 'when they [Israel] went into Egypt, the Shekinah went with them; in Babylon the Shekinah was with them' (Talmud, *Megillah 29a*).

The term *Shekinah* originates with God's glory 'dwelling' over the tabernacle (Exodus 40.35) and indicates both divine presence and continuity. An important image of the Shekinah is the continuity of the divine presence even when in exile, seen in the cloud and fire leading the people in the Exodus account, and later taken to be present after the fall of the Temple in 70 CE. The prologue to John's Gospel might have been developing similar concepts, especially with the allusion there to the 'tabernacling' of the Word. Drawing upon a pun in Greek where the word for 'tent' is similar to the Hebrew for 'to dwell' (1.14), Jesus, the Word of God, is depicted as encamping with the people of the world — 'and the word became flesh and dwelt (lit. tabernacled) among us'. We thus discover a similarity of the Jewish and Christian concepts of divine presence, which serves not only as a theological issue of dialogue but of greater understanding of the bridges between our faiths.

One might also make comparisons with the Jewish understanding of Torah. Mainstream rabbinic Judaism taught that *Moses* received the Torah from Sinai but there was also a tradition that the Torah was in existence before the creation of the world (eg., Ben Sira 1:1—5), or even before the creation of the Throne of Glory (Genesis Rabbah 1:4). Torah was equated with Wisdom (Proverbs 8:22) and Philo wrote about the pre-existence and role in creation of the word of God (logos), which he identified with the Torah (Migration 130). Although Philo did not have the same understanding of the incarnate logos that is found in the prologue to John's Gospel, it is striking that a Jew who lived at the same time as the authors of the New Testament, and who probably never even heard of Jesus, spoke of the fatherhood of God and of the logos as his image: 'Even if we are not yet suitable to be called the sons and daughters of God, still we may be called the children of his eternal image, of his most sacred word (logos)' (On the Confusion of Tongues 147). Later, of course, Christianity understood logos as the 'Word of God', which referred to Jesus as God Incarnate.

Rabbinic Judaism also personified Torah, describing how God discussed the creation of the world with the Torah. On another occasion the Torah is described as Israel's bride. Another feature of the Torah according to the rabbis is that it was eternal. Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:17 that he has come not to destroy but to fulfil the Torah is reminiscent of the rabbinic teaching of its non-abrogability. The rabbis taught that the Torah would exist in the world to come, but interestingly it was also argued that changes to the Torah would take place in the

messianic age (Genesis Rabbah 98:9), although this was later rejected by Maimonides, who held there would be no change after the coming of the messiah.

This discussion of Torah is another example of how Jews may understand better than we first think the way Christian theology treats Christ although the divine origin of Torah is never viewed as the self-manifestation of God. However, it might be suggested that the description of Christ who 'bears the very stamp of God's nature' (Heb 1.3) is not too dissimilar.

Let us look at another closely related and important topic, which I think sheds light on our dialogue: atonement. This theme at first glace demonstrates the significant differences between Judaism and Christianity — notably the nature of human beings and the efficacy of vicarious atonement.

The conventional Jewish understanding of human nature sees people as having two inclinations, one calling people to the good and the other to wrong actions. People, having free will, are capable of responding to the one inclination or the other. To such an understanding of human nature, "sin" is less a condition than an adjective to describe wrong actions chosen. In addition, the consequences of such actions are not ineradicable. Rather, they can be reversed by *teshuvah*.

In Christian thought, the understanding of atonement is conditioned upon a different understanding of human nature. People are understood

to be conceived in sin, and held in the bonds of original sin, what Augustine calls "inherited corruption". In this fallen state, they are unable to save themselves. The death of Jesus (born without defilement by original sin) is understood as atonement necessary to save people in a way that they cannot save themselves.

The second significant issue is vicarious atonement. The rabbis require the involvement of the individual in their own *teshuvah*. The practice of vicarious atonement came to an end in Judaism with the cessation of sacrificial cult when the Temple was destroyed. In Christian teaching, the Christ event is understood as *the* great act of atonement in human history. Jesus' death becomes, in effect, a vicarious atonement on behalf of all those who believe in him. To such a perspective, it is not the action of the believer that is significant, but the action taken on the believer's behalf.

Nevertheless, despite these significant differences, there is considerable commonality in the religious practice of the two communities of faith. Both liturgies offer the faithful the opportunity to confess their sins to God and to seek forgiveness from God for those failures. And, as a practical matter, both Jewish and Christian practice include a strong emphasis on reconciliation between people and between the individual and God, from whom they may have become estranged. Both traditions include concrete practices to ritualize the act of atonement: the rite of Confession in the Catholic Church, the various forms of atonement ritual in the Protestant traditions, and the

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Day of Atonement — along with other ritualizations of confession — in Judaism.

Let us therefore return to the question of whether there can be any commonality in terms of incarnational theology. Indeed, there has been some Jewish interest in this subject, most importantly by Michael Wyschogrod (see especially, *The Body of Faith: God in the People of Israel*, 1989) who emphasises God's free yet irrevocable love for the people Israel, and in connection with Israel, for the world as a whole.

A major theme for Wyschogrod is that God's election of Israel is based solely on God's unalterable love and cannot be abrogated from the human side. God did not choose Israel because it was superior in any way to other peoples; indeed, in some respects it may even possess slightly more negative characteristics than other groups. Nor is God's election conditional upon Israel's obedience to the commands that God imposes on Israel as the expression of God's will for Israel's conduct. God's election brings with it God's command and the threat of severe punishment should Israel fail to live up to its election. Yet in spite of the fact that the Jewish people have struggled endlessly against their election, with the most disastrous consequences for themselves and for the rest of humankind, the divine election remains unaffected because it is an unconditional one, based solely on God's love.[19]

Incarnational christology is a subject of interest to Wyschogrod in his discussion of Christianity who perceives a certain convergence between

Judaism and Christianity. He makes clear that Christian claims on behalf of Jesus are problematic from the perspective of Jewish faith. The claim that Jesus was the Messiah is difficult for Jews to accept because Jesus did not perform a key messianic function: he did not usher in the messianic kingdom. More difficult by far, however, is the Christian claim that God was incarnate in Jesus. For a Jew to subscribe to this belief would mean a grave violation of the prohibition against idolatry.[20]

Nevertheless, Wyschogrod does not think that Jews are entitled to dismiss the Christian claim about God's incarnation in Jesus out of hand. To reject the incarnation on *a priori* grounds would be to impose external constraints on God's freedom, a notion fundamentally foreign to Judaism. According to Wyschogrod, there is only one condition under which Israel would be entitled to reject the church's claims about Jesus out of hand, and that is if these claims were to imply that God had repudiated God's promises to Israel. For that is something that Israel can safely trust that God will never do, not because God is unable, but because God honours God's promises.

The question, then, is whether incarnational theology implies the abrogation of God's promises to Israel. Is this necessarily the case?

For Christians, the question of the validity of Judaism challenges some of the proclamations of Christian triumphalism. The issue, which we need to ask, is whether Christianity can differentiate itself from

Judaism without asserting itself as either opposed to Judaism or simply as the replacement of Judaism.

But does Christianity teach the replacement of Judaism? If we examine the writings of the Church Fathers the only possible answer is 'yes'! The fathers argued that because the Jews had rejected Jesus they were punished by having their Temple destroyed and by being exiled from the Land of Israel. Christians allowed Jews to survive in an impoverished state so that their lowly position could witness the truth of Christianity. As a result, contempt for Judaism became central to Christian teaching and to the development of Christian identity.

Fortunately — for both Jew and Christian — the days when Christian identity was dependent on a negation of all things Jewish have passed. Indeed, there is not only a re-awakening to the Jewishness of Christianity but recognition that the formation of Christian identity today is dependent upon a positive relationship with Judaism.

Ironically, this is not a new theological approach but a re-discovery of an old theological doctrine, which is expressed, in the earliest New Testament writings — the letters of Paul. In his letter to the Romans (especially chapters 9-11) Paul tackles exactly this point when he raises a particularly controversial question: what of the ongoing validity of God's covenant with his Jewish people? Did the Church, as the New Israel, simply replace the Old as inheritors of God's promises? If so, does this mean that God reneges on his word? If God has done so with regard to Jews, what guarantee is there for the churches that he

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won't do so again, to Christians this time?

One might argue against Paul by saying that if the Jews have not kept faith with God, then God has a perfect right to cast them off. It is interesting that Christians who argue this way have not often drawn the same deduction about Christian faithfulness, which has not been a notable and consistent characteristic of the last two millennia. Actually, God seems to have had a remarkable ability to keep faith with both Christians and Jews when they have not kept faith with God, a point of which Paul is profoundly aware in Romans 9-11. He goes out of his way to deny claims that God has rejected the chosen people, and asserts that their stumbling does not lead to their fall.

In Paul's view it was impossible for God to elect the Jewish people as a whole and then later displace them. In his view, the hardening took place so that the Gentiles would receive the opportunity to join the people of God. The Church's election, therefore, derives from that of Israel but this does not imply that God's covenant with Israel is broken. Rather, it remains unbroken — irrevocably.

Paul also offers a severe warning that gentile Christians should not be haughty or boastful toward unbelieving Jews — much less cultivate evil intent and engage in persecution against them. This critical warning remained almost totally forgotten by Christians in history. Christians have remembered the Jews as "enemies" but not as "beloved" of God and have taken to heart Paul's criticisms and used them against the Jews

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while forgetting Paul's love for the Jews and their traditions.

It is common for Christian theologians to turn to the arguments of Paul and call for Christianity to abandon its historical religious animosity and misleading caricature of Judaism has been overwhelming. These are now admitted as something wrong and their full and public rejection was required before the possibility of dialogue might exist. Thus, before dialogue could really begin with Judaism, Christianity needed to shift from what was, for the most part, an inherent need to condemn Judaism to one of a condemnation of Christian anti-Judaism. This process has not led to a separation from all things Jewish but, in fact, to a closer relationship with "the elder brother". In our times we are witnessing the occurrence of a demonstrable shift from a Christian monologue about Jews to an instructive (and sometimes difficult) dialogue with Jews.

For Wyschogrod, the doctrine of God's incarnation could be understood as a kind of intensification of God's covenant with Israel. Although the incarnation is not foreseeable on the basis of the Hebrew Bible, once the fact of the incarnation is assumed (as it is by Christians), it can be regarded as an extension of the Bible's basic thrust.

In an article entitled *Incarnation and God's Indwelling in Israel*, Wyschogrod argues that the covenant between God and Israel results not just in a closeness and intimacy between them but includes an indwelling of God in the people of Israel whose status as a holy people may be said to derive from this indwelling. He suggests,

controversially, that the divinity of Jesus is not radically different than the holiness of the Jewish people.[21]

John Pawlikowski has also taken an interest in this topic such as

Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue[22]

and has

suggested that "Incarnational Christology has the best possibility for preserving such universalistic dimensions of the Christ Event while opening 'authentic theological space in for Judaism,' as the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin termed it."[23]

Ultimately, however, the question to what extent the Church is part of God's plan for the world depends, from a Jewish perspective, upon whether Christianity aims to replace Israel. Traditionally, the church has proclaimed itself to be the true Israel (*verus Israel*), comprising the faithful of all nations, in relation to which the old carnal Israel existed as a temporary foreshadowing. By claiming to be God's new people, replacing the old, the church undermines God's promises and is a rebellion against God's word.

This is reminiscent of the early period of Jewish-Christian relations when Jews reminded Christians that Jesus lived his life not as a Christian but as a Jew. Jesus was a Jew, not an alien intruder in 1st-century Palestine. Whatever else he was, he was a reformer of Jewish beliefs, not an indiscriminate faultfinder of them. For Jews, the significance of Jesus must be in his life rather than his death, a

life of faith in God. For Jews, not Jesus but God alone is Lord.

Yet an increasing number of Jews are proud that Jesus was born, lived and died a Jew. Now a few of us are willing to consider the even more challenging theological doctrines of our partners. We are looking for bridges to create greater understanding between our communities; to establish a chevruta, a partnership, in which we seek not only to build respect but also to further understanding; not only to acknowledge difference but to build bridges.

Separately and together, we must work to bring healing to our world. In this enterprise, we are, as Christians and Jews, guided by the vision of the prophets of Israel:

It shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established at the top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills, and the nations shall flow unto it . . . and many peoples shall go and say, "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2:2-3)

1. Die Deutschen Bischöfe, *Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zum Judentum* vom 28. April 1980, in: *Die Kirchen und das Judentum. Band I: Dokumente von 1945 bis 1985*, Rolf Rendtorff and Hans Hermann Henrix, eds., 3rd ed. (Paderborn/Gütersloh: Bonifatius — Gütersloher Verlag, 2001), 260-280, 275 = German Bishops' Conference, *The Church and the Jews*, (1980, IV.2): www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/german_church_jews.html (August 11, 2006).
2. Thus Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise. Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*. R. Kendall Soulen, ed., (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), 166; Michael Wyschogrod, "Inkarnation aus jüdischer Sicht": *Evangelische Theologie* 55 (1995): 13-28, 15; Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith. Judaism as Corporeal Election* (New York:

The Seabury Press, 1983), 211-215. Similarly, Eugene B. Borowitz, *Contemporary Christologies: A Jewish Response* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1980), 31f.; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Judaisms and Incarnational Theologies: Mapping out the Parameters of Dialogue: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39 (2002): 219-247; cf. the Christian resonance to the Jewish perspective: Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Das christliche Bekenntnis zu Jesus, dem Juden. Eine Christologie*. Band 1 (München: Kaiser, 1990); Josef Wohlmuth, *Die Tora spricht die Sprache der Menschen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), especially 36-40; Josef Wohlmuth, Jesus der Bruder und Christus der Herr, in: *Redet Wahrheit — Dabru Emet. Jüdisch-christliches Gespräch über Gott, Messias und Dekalog* (Münster: Lit, 2004), 91-109; Hans Hermann Henrix, *Judentum und Christentum: Gemeinschaft wider Willen* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2004), 156-174; Clemens Thoma, Juden und Christen beten denselben Gott an: Monotheismus und Trinität, in: *Juden und Christen im Gespräch über "Dabru emet — Redet Wahrheit"* (Paderborn/Frankfurt a.M. : Bonifatius/Lembeck, 2005) 89-102.

3. Quotations from Emmanuel Levinas, Menschwerdung Gottes?, in: Emmanuel Levinas, *Zwischen uns. Versuche über das Denken an den Anderen*. Translated from the French by Frank Miething (Wien: Carl Hanser, 1995), 73-82, 77f.

4. Michael Wyschogrod, Warum war und ist Karl Barths Theologie für einen jüdischen Theologen von Interesse?: *Evangelische Theologie* 34 (1974) 222-236, 226; similarly, Jeshajahu Leibowitz, *Gespräche über Gott und die Welt* (with Michael Shashar; translated from the Hebrew by Matthias Schmidt) (Frankfurt: Insel 1990), 74 or Peter Ochs, The God of Jews and Christians, in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, eds. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David F. Sandmel, Michael A. Signer (Boulder/Oxford: Westview Press, 2000), 49-69, 59.
5. Martin Buber, Die Brennpunkte der jüdischen Seele (1930), in: Martin Buber, *Der Jude und sein Judentum. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Reden* (Gerlingen: Lambert Schneider, 1993), 196-206, 205.

6. On this cf. Clemens Thoma, *Die theologischen Beziehungen zwischen Christentum und Judentum*, 2nd. ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 111 or Zwi Werblowsky, *Juden und Christen am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Unpublished manuscript of November 5, 1999, pp. 2-5).

7. On the discussion, cf. among others the anthology: Josef Wohlmuth, ed., *Emmanuel Levinas — eine Herausforderung für die christliche Theologie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998).

8. Quoted according to: www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/creeds.chalcedon.txt.
9. Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Exodus*, edited on behalf of the Leo Baeck-Institute by Shlomo Mayer under co-operation of Joachim Hahn and Almuth Jürgensen (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1997), 859; here quoted after: Christoph Dohmen, Exodus 19 -40 (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2004), 247.
10. So with Christoph Dohmen, op. cit., 247 and 274.
11. See for the exegetical discussion of the statements of the Hebrew Bible on God's "dwelling" and on its derivates such as *shekinah* only: A. R. Hulst, article "Å¡kn wohnen": *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, Vol. II. (München/Zürich: Kaiser/Theologischer Verlag, 1976), 904-909; Johan Brinkman, *The Perception of Space in the Old Testament. An exploration of the methodological problems of its investigation, exemplified by a study of Exodus 25 to 31* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992); Ralph E. Hendrix, *The Use of MiÅ¡kan and 'Oh'ed in Exodus 25-40*, Andrews University Seminary Studies 30 (1992) 3-13; Bernd Janowski, *Gottes Gegenwart in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), especially 11-147;

214-246, 247-280; Susanne Owczarek, *Die Vorstellung vom "Wohnen Gottes inmitten seines Volkes" in der Priesterschrift* (Frankfurt a.M. Peter Land, 1998) and Christoph Dohmen, op. cit.

12. Thus in Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Das christliche Bekenntnis zu Jesus . . .* 1, op. cit., 115f.
13. Michael Wyschogrod, *Inkarnation*, ibid., p. 22; cf. also Michael Wyschogrod, *Gott und Volk Israel. Dimensionen jüdischen Glaubens* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2001), 21, 42, 62, 79, 91, 105, 125, 185ff.
14. Thus also, picking up Wyschogrod's thought: Elliot R. Wolfson, Judaism and Incarnation: The Imaginal Body of God, in: *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 239-254.
15. "There is a good reason for the severity of the Jewish rejection of the incarnation. No matter how close God comes to humankind in the Hebrew Bible, no matter how much God is included in human hopes and fears, he still remains the eternal judge of the human being, whose nature is to be in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26f.), but who may not be mingled with God. . . In the light of this, the statement that a human being was God can only give rise to most profound concern in the Jewish soul": Michael Wyschogrod, Ein neues Stadium im jüdisch-christlichen Dialog: *Freiburger Rundbrief* 34 (1982) 22-26, 26.; similarly Michael Wyschogrod: Christologie ohne Antijudaismus?: *Kirche und Israel* 7 (1992) 6-9 or: *Abraham's Promise*, op. cit., 165-178, especially 174ff.

16. Thus by Walter Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, 8th ed. (Mainz: Grünewald, 1981), 280. See also Josef Wohlmuth, *Jesus der Bruder und Christus der Herr*, op. cit., 96ff.

17. Pope John Paul II, Address to Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission - 11 April 1997; quoted according to: www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1997/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19970411_pont-com-biblica_en.html. German: Johannes Paul II., Ansprache an die Vollversammlung der Päpstlichen Bibelkommission am 11. April 1997, in: Hans Hermann Henrix/Wolfgang Kraus, eds., *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*. Band 2: Dokumente von 1985 bis 2000 (Paderborn/Gütersloh: Bonifatius/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 102-105, 103f.
18. See further, John McDade, "Catholic Christianity and Judaism since Vatican II", New Blackfriars, forthcoming; see also, Elliot Wolfson, "Judaism and Incarnation: the imaginal body of God" *Christianity in Jewish Terms* eds.,. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al (Oxford: Westview) 2000, pp .239-253; and Randi Rashkover, "The Christian Doctrine of Incarnation", *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, pp .254-62.
19. See, Kendall Soulen, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM, 2005) pp 1-22. Also, "Michael Wyschogrod and God's First Love", *The Christian Century*, July, 2004 pp. 22-27.
20. Michael Wyschogrod, "A Jewish Perspective on Incarnation", *New Theology* (1996) 12:2, pp 195-209.
21. The article was first published in Incarnation, M Olivetti (Cedam: Biblioteca dell 'Archivo di Filosofia) 1999 pp 147-157; see also, Soulen, op cit. pp. 165-78.
22. John T. Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (new edition). Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001. See also, "Reflections on Covenant and Mission" *Themes in Jewish-Christian Relations*, eds., Edward Kessler and Melanie J. Wright, (Cambridge: Orchard Academic) 2005, pp 273-299.
23. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, *Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue.* Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996, 78-79.

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