The covenant has never been revoked

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Basis of the Christian-Jewish relationship. A review of changing attitudes in the theology of the churches.

The covenant has never been revoked:

Basis of the Christian-Jewish relationship

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Introduction

The concept of an old and a new covenant is still perceived by many Christians to mean two divine covenants, where the old is succeeded and surpassed by the new. They still believe that with Jesus Christ the old covenant has been abolished and cancelled. Accordingly, the Jewish people, Israel, God"s partner in the old covenant, is seen as a kind of fossil that belonged to an earlier period of salvation history, which does not exist anymore. They believe that Israel should actually have entered the new covenant by receiving Jesus of Nazareth as its Messiah. Because it did not do so, it is seen as living in a vacuum as far as the covenant is concerned: the old covenant no longer exists, and the new covenant it did not acknowledge.[1]

This concept still has its advocates in Christian theology today in a variety of either crude or more sophisticated versions. Nevertheless, today this theology is being severely tested. It is examined and weighed in theological discussion, where the scholars in exegetics are more in front and those in systematics seem to be holding back.

In the Christian-Jewish dialogue, on the other hand, there is no longer any doubt that the traditional thesis about the invalidity of the old covenant has to be abandoned. Here it has become the Shibboleth or prerequisite for participation in serious theological dialogue between Christians and Jews. However, this does not render superfluous the need for argument and clarification. It is still necessary. What is the Jewish position in regards to the covenant? Is there a possibility in Christian theology to react to Jewish self-definition? What does the church officially teach about God"s covenant with Israel? I will explore these questions in two ways, where each is prefaced by a guiding proposition.

First Proposition

The traditional Christian understanding of an old and a new covenant faces Jewish opposition. In his classical dialogue with Karl Ludwig Schmidt two weeks before Hitler came to power, Martin Buber stated succinctly: "We have not been rejected!" Buber"s Christian dialogue partner was unable to take up this Jewish challenge, nor was the official teaching of the church at that time able to give an answer. Still, the traditional thesis that the old covenant has been abandoned and is now superseded by the new covenant shows its effects even in present-day theologies. Very few theologians are willing to listen to what Jews say about themselves and are trying to find a positive response on the basis of a Christian theological position.

The story of a dialogue

Martin Buber, the great Jewish thinker, interpreter and educator (1878-1965), presented the Jewish understanding of covenant in a simple classical form. He did this during the historical dialogue with the Protestant New Testament scholar Karl Ludwig Schmidt, on January 14, 1933, in the Jewish "Lehrhaus" (House of Teaching) in Stuttgart, Germany. The Ordinarius for the Interpretation of the New Testament at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Bonn had agreed with Buber: the relationship between church and Judaism had nothing to do with the ideologies of "Volk" (peoplehood) and race, which were wildly debated at that time. Rather, it concerned God"s covenant with God"s people. However, Schmidt agreed with Buber with this reservation that he would speak of an old and a new covenant quite differently than Buber. In discerning between the two covenants Schmidt rejected the Jewish understanding of God"s covenant with the Jewish

people. He believed that the Jews were meant to enter the church, which in turn sees itself as the people called by God in Jesus Christ to be the true spiritual Israel. Martin Buber answered by telling a story, the moving assertion of his certainty in Judaism and his Jewishness, which is worth reading and hearing over and over again:

"I do not live live far from the city of Worms, to which I also feel bound through the tradition of my forebears; and from time to time I go over there. And when I"m there, I first walk to the cathedral. There you have the harmony of structural members become visible, there is a wholeness in which no part misses the perfection of the whole. I am walking around, envisioning the cathedral in perfect joy. And then I walk over to the Jewish cemetery. It consists of crooked, chopped, formless gravestones, without any direction. I put myself there and then I look up from this confusion to the beautiful harmony, and I feel as if I looked up from Israel to the church. Down here is not a bit of form; here one has only the stones and the ashes under the stones. One has the ashes, even though they may have diminished very much... I stood there, was united with the ashes and right across them with the ancestors. This is remembrance of the events with God, which is given to all Jews. The perfection of the Christian *space of God* cannot take me away from this, nothing can take me away from Israel"s *time with God* (italics by transl.). I stood there and I experienced everything myself, death has befallen me: all the ashes, all the chopping, all the soundless misery is mine; but the covenant has not been revoked. I"m lying on the ground, tumbled like these stones. But I have not been rejected. The cathedral is as it is. The cemetery is as it is. But we have not been rejected."[2]

There followed no answer from the Christian dialogue partner to Buber"s opposing and confessing word, "but the covenant has not been revoked." Considering his previously presented positions the answer could only have been a denial of Buber"s confession. It would have been based on New Testament statements - perhaps on 2 Corinthians 3, where Paul speaks about the paleness and transitoriness of the service of the covenant carved in stone (the Sinai covenant) and where he uses the term "old covenant" (verses 4-18), which occurs only here in the New Testament. Accordingly, in the eighth chapter of the letter to the Hebrews it states, "If that first covenant had been without a fault, there would have been no need for a second one to replace it... By speaking of a new covenant, he implies that the first one is already old. Now anything old only gets more antiquated until in the end it disappears," (verses 7 and 13).

It appears that the confession of Buber, "but the covenant has not been terminated," is in conflict with the statements of the New Testament. The New Testament scholar, Karl Ludwig Schmidt, who only a short time later came into conflict with the Nazi regime and had to immigrate to Switzerland, would probably have argued in this fashion. But also the official Catholic position of the time would have been a rejection of Buber"s claim. This rejection can be explained by pointing to a long forgotten event.

The story of Amici Israel

In 1926 an association, "Amici Israel" (Friends of Israel), had been formed in Rome. The association wanted to prepare for the conversion of Jews to Christianity. Through intensive efforts the association managed to win more than 2,000 priests, among them many bishops and cardinals, as members. One of the association"s pamphlets, "pax super Israel" (Peace over Israel) described in detail, how members could draw closer to Jews by avoiding any speech that could be hurtful to them and by emphasizing the continuing special election of Israel. The association"s program recommended paying special attention to God"s loving preference for the people Israel and the continuation (perduratio) of this love.[3] At the time this was an amazing attitude. In the reference to the "continuation" of God"s love for God"s people one might even see a distant relationship to Buber"s understanding of the "covenant that has not been terminated." Obviously, it was just this view which led the Holy Office to step in. With a decree of March 25, 1928, the association "Amici Israel" was dissolved.

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The comments of the [Catholic] teaching authority explain that the Jewish people was "the custodian of the divine promises up to Jesus Christ" and that it is this no more since Jesus Christ. It was "the once elected people of God", but since this election has become invalid, so also the covenant, in which the election of God manifests itself, was terminated and revoked.[4]

Replacement theology in dogmatics

Have present-day theology and dogmatic statements further developed since that time? If one proceeds to put this question to Catholic fundamental theology and dogmatics, one meets the fact that in dogmatic-systematic theology the concept of "covenant" hardly plays any role. The "silence about covenant" of systematic theology is astonishing, considering the weight of the covenant concept in the Bible. This certainly corresponds to the very subordinate role the covenant played in the theology of the high Middle Ages. The Protestant historian Martin Greschat explains this finding by the fact that ecclesiology absorbed the elements of covenant: "The church as the sacramental institution of salvation regulates the interplay (that varies in the different covenants) between divine promise and human obligation."[5]

The most important dogmatics of Catholic scholarly theology in the first decade after the Second Vatican Council, "Mysterium Salutis" (mystery of salvation)[6] follows a salvation-historical concept that is open towards a reconsideration of biblical covenant theology. However, there the statements about God"s covenant with Israel still only speak about biblical, pre-church Israel. They appear as a realization of the biblical understanding of covenant, but are forgetful about post-biblical Judaism. They seem to fit the traditional theories, according to which the church replaces Israel. This fundamental work of dogmatics does, of course, not present a theory of termination or substitution, but neither does it overcome these through explicit argument.[7] A very remarkable affirmation of the old substitution theory, though, is found in the "Lexicon of Catholic Dogmatics" of 1987, edited by Wolfgang Beinert, and in his article about covenant.[8] Already in establishing biblical argument, the author speaks of the positive supersession of the Sinai covenant. He does not shy away from formulating an allegedly Pauline "difference between the deteriorated old and the new covenant". No wonder then, when the following free theological expansion states: "Ecclesiologically the covenant switches from the old to the new people of God, from Israel to the church. While Israel as a limited people exercised a limited mandate for salvation, the church finds its home from its beginning in all nations and has been sent to all nations as messenger of salvation"(p. 48).

Replacement in progressive theologies

The thesis of the repeal and termination of the old covenant is even represented in progressive theologies. Whoever examines the basic works of liberation theology of Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff or Jon Sobrino, finds not only evidence that with them Israel has fallen into oblivion, but also anti-Jewish polemical remarks, which occasionally led to a bitter and painful controversy with Jewish authors.[9] The controversial remarks in works of liberation theology come from an undiscerning reiteration of a tradition, according to which God"s covenant with Israel has been abrogated and does not exist anymore. The systematic theology of the 1990"s strengthens this tradition no more. However, only timidly are the obvious problems of a supersessionist theology taken up by systematic theology.

Timid acceptance of a continuing covenant

The four volume work, "Manual of Fundamental Theology" of 1985 to 1988 (Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie) appears to be somehow in the passage from a phase, where the old tradition of the termination of the old covenant was acceptable, to a phase of timid acceptance of dealing with the problem. The manual is eloquently silent in regards to an explicit theology of covenant. It is contradictory in itself, when in the second tract about revelation Helmut Merklein on

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the one hand develops his understanding of Israel as "calamity collective" contrasted with Jesus and on the other hand Hans Waldenfels attests a lasting truthfulness to Judaism with reference to the irrevocable love and affection for Israel of its covenantal God. It appears like a structural indecision, when in the ecclesiological tract "Church" Gerhard Lohfink sees the church as non-identical with Israel. He sees it as something like a problem birth, because Jesus wanted the eschatological gathering of all Israel. He emphatically rejects the thesis of the church as substitution for Israel. However, he is not able to envision the critical importance of the old covenant for Israel apart from the church.[10]

While Gerhard Lohfink seems to think that the call to turn around is primarily addressed to Israel, the two-volume "Manual of Dogmatics", edited by Theodor Schneider, insists that it is the break between church and Israel that causes the church to speak about its own need to "constantly turn back". Siegfried Wiedenhofer makes it commendably clear, "that any definition of the relationship of Judaism and Christianity that does not explicitly hold to the salvation-historical particularity and lasting religious meaning of Judaism is theologically wrong and practically dangerous. With this the church"s every "self-assertion and claim to absolute right directed against Judaism" is rejected. One of the internal presuppositions of this theological view, which still very well sticks to the separation and fundamental difference between church and Judaism, is the statement that "God has not terminated the covenant with Israel."[11]

Buber"s understanding of God"s Israel covenant, "we have not been rejected", is not, therefore, without a pertinent echo in present-day Christian scholarly theology. That this is true in relation to Catholics as well as Protestants can be illustrated by two references.

New ways of theological thinking

Ten years ago Hans Waldenfels, a theologian at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Bonn, presented a manual "Contextual Fundamental Theology."[12] Waldenfels" "justification by faith" is especially concerned with the variety of contexts and constellations of present-day faith: his context includes the division of Christianity into many churches, the secularization or varieties of ideologies and the juxtaposition of different religions. However, the author does not here include Judaism. From a Christian viewpoint Judaism cannot simply be placed with the world religions like Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism. This would overlook or deny the particular bond of solidarity of the church with the Jewish people. Hans Waldenfels does not want such denial. He begins his presentation of the relationship between the church and the world with a reflection about the relationship of "Church and Synagogue" (p.388-392). Even at the very beginning he makes his position known: "According to the letter to the Romans God"s loyal covenant with his people has not been broken; Israel has not fallen back into the status of one people among many others". Logically the headline of the subsection is: "The covenant not terminated". Here he offers a tight sketch of Paul"s understanding of Israel, who despite of the Jewish majority"s refusal to believe Jesus as the Christ, holds to the irrevocable vocation of Israel. Waldenfels sums up Pauline theology: "The Jewish people is now and always God"s chosen people. The covenant is not only not terminated but also not terminable" (so with J. Oesterreicher). It is true, the statements of Waldenfels still have very much the character of remarks, which do not really and centrally define his theology.

A more radical approach

The thesis of the covenant not terminated, and not terminable is moved from marginality to the centre of dogmatics in the theology of the Protestant systematic theologian Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt. In the introduction volume of his dogmatics, "Of the misery and visitation of theology", Marquardt thinks explicitly and comprehensively through the long-term relationship between the church and the Jewish people.[13] Theology reflects "the biblically attested and ongoing history of

the encounters of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the father of Jesus Christ with the people Israel and all nations around it"(p.35). The history of these encounters is covenantal history. And it is *one* history. It is a unity of covenantal history, which is so full of wealth and plenty that Marquardt can say: "The Christian church recognizes in holy Scripture and confesses... to be joined to God only as confederate of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. So she may, because of her own relationship with God, confess the covenant, which according to the Scriptures is not terminated. Upon God"s fidelity to Israel depends the promise of his fidelity also to the church. If God"s covenant with Israel had been revoked, the Church would have built on sand and not on rock; her very foundations would then be shaken."(p.435) In such a theology the church appears "elected only as co-elected, called only as called alongside, sanctified only as co-sanctified, joined to God only as covenantal partner of the covenant between God and Israel."(p.425) The continuation of the "old" covenant is so central, that it determines what it means to be a Christian. "By becoming a Christian a person is called by God into a life-relationship with the Jewish people".(p.374) Marquardt does not say this without support, that is, outside the context of Jesus Christ. For him the Christian life-relationship with the Jewish people, this relationship with Israel, is a way of relating to Christ.(p.458) Christ is the peace between Israel and the peoples of the world, who changes the enmity between them to community. These basic concepts are carried forward in his two-volume Christology with the characteristic title, "The Christian confession to Jesus, the Jew".[14]

In his work Marquardt says repeatedly that such theological knowledge - founded on biblical sources - arises out of the concrete circumstances of life and in life-contact with Jews and Judaism. A theology, which shuts itself off from such life contact, shuts itself off from the theological renewal of the relationship to Judaism. Is the church and its leadership in regards to this proposition perhaps further ahead than parts of theological scholarship?

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Second Proposition

Reflecting the Christian-Jewish relationship one discovers a reversal of the usual pattern of advance and holding back between expert theology and the church. While scholarly theology only hesitantly perceives the continuity of the covenant of God with Israel, a considerable number of official church statements regarding the Christian-Jewish relationship have been much more forth-coming and determined in their affirmation: God"s covenant with Israel has not been revoked. An exponent of this broad inter-church consent is Pope John Paul II, who takes up Martin Buber"s words literally and thereby leans mainly on the letter to the Romans. Church doctrine today sees the church, as well as the Jewish people, in covenant with God. The covenant reality embraces both. This is the nature of the ecumene, in which both are joined to each other.

The churches and the Jewish people

How theology and preaching explain Christian faith in its relation to the Jewish people and tradition does finally depend on whether their spokespersons stand in a life-contact with Jews and Judaism. It is the experience of the past two decades that representatives of the churches and their leaderships have established such contacts with Jewish communities and their representatives. In official encounters with a Jewish delegation or in prayer gatherings or at informal contacts bishops and church representatives have gained insights that caused them to free themselves from religious prejudices and to start a process of theological rethinking. Corresponding impulses of this

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reversal and renewal have found their way into church statements about the Christian-Jewish relationship. These are now present in large number and variety.[15] They extend from papal addresses to ecumenical guidelines of individual dioceses, from Vatican documents to declarations of nati™ÂBÂ bishop"s conferences, from texts of the World Council of Churches to resolutions of regional Protestant churches. Analysing their contents "we encounter a reversal of the relationship between scientific theology and the church, which is amazing and rare in terms of theology and church history. Generally, theology with its open discussions is more "advanced" than the church with her carefully formulated doctrinal decisions. In regards to the Christian-Jewish relationship today... it is clearly the reverse. While scientific theologians in their majority still close their minds to a theological renewal of the relationship with Judaism, churches have already committed themselves to it..."[16] This is an ecumenical finding about Christian acceptance of the covenant of God with Israel.

The Catholic church and the Jews

For the Catholic church the theological turn was introduced by the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the relationship to non-Christian religions of October 28, 1965. This fundamental Council document does not yet specifically express the thesis that God"s covenant with Israel was not revoked. However, it gives strong direction, when it states: "The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the apostle about his kinsmen: "Theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises..."" How much the Council wanted to use the present tense in this formulation of the letter to the Romans, from which it quotes (Rom. 9:4-5), becomes obvious through an added reminder of the Pauline letter: The Jews remain even in their non-acceptance of the gospel still always loved by God "for the sake of their Fathers; he does not repent of the gifts he makes or of the calls he issues."[17]

As one of the first post-conciliar synods, the Synod of the Archdiocese of Vienna took up the word of the Council with their statement of October 1970, when it said: "According to Romans 9 - 11, the existence and history of the Jewish people are mysteries of salvation in the eyes of Christians; hence, the latter must see the existence of the Jews of our day as a part of salvation history... We firmly believe that the New Covenant in Christ did not abrogate the promises of the Old."[18]

Attention to present-day Judaism and recognition of the continued existence of the old covenant is requested by the Pastoral Recommendations of the French Conference of Bishops, "The attitude of Christians towards Judaism", of April 16, 1973. It states: "According to biblical revelation God himself constituted this people, brought it up, advised it of his plans, concluding with it an eternal covenant (Gen. 17:7) and gaving it a vocation which the apostle Paul qualifies as "irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29)... Even though in Jesus Christ the covenant was renewed for Christians, the Jewish people must not be looked upon by Christians as a mere social and historical reality but most of all as a religious one; not as the relic of a venerable and finished past, but as a reality alive through the ages."[19] Here the church does not take possession of a biblical understanding of covenant that robs Israel and Judaism of the covenant. Rather, the eternity of its covenant is emphasized and the irreversibility of its covenantal calling maintained. This is repeated under the aspect of election: "Contrary to what an ancient but contested catechesis has sustained, we must not deduce from the New Testament, that the Jewish people were deprived of its election. Scripture as a whole asks us, on the contrary, to recognize that the fidelity of the Jewish people to the Law and Covenant is a sign of the fidelity of God toward his people." The continued existence of the old covenant, however, raises the question of the relationship of the new covenant to the old. The French recommendations address this question briefly as well: "The first covenant was not made invalid by the New covenant. The former is the root and source of the second - its foundation and its promise."

In numerous statements from various parts of the Catholic church an insight of faith has taken root,

which echoes the Jewish self-understanding that the covenant has not been revoked.[20] As well, numerous statements from the churches of the Reformation could be mentioned.[21] One can speak, therefore, of a broad ecumenical consensus in regards to the fact that the "old" covenant has not been revoked - right up to Pope John Paul II.

Pope John Paul II

During his first pastoral journey through Germany John Paul II met with the Jewish Central Council in Germany and the German Rabbinical Conference on November 17, 1980, in the Cathedral Museum of Mainz. In his address the Pope emphasized that in the benevolent dialogue between Jews and Christians - which in Germany "is of special significance before the dark background of the attempted extermination of the whole of Jewry - the concern is not only to correct a wrong religious view of the Jewish people, but above all to have a dialogue between the two religions.[22] The Pope sketches three dimensions of this dialogue between the Jewish people and the church. He mentiones the essential dimension in second place: "A second dimension of our dialogue - the true and central one - is the meeting between present-day Christian churches and the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses". The Pope expresses his interest in the present-day Jewish people unequivocally. He wants the dialogue between Judaism and the church to take place according to each of their own religious and present-day identities. He clearly goes beyond looking back to biblical Israel and wants no dialogue that is not between concurrent partners - not between the church of today and the Israel of the Bible or the time of Jesus. A dialogue between contemporaries is clearly the Pope"s model. According to his word the present-day Jewish people is the people of the covenant. And this covenant he qualifies in mentioning the first dimension of the dialogue as follows: "The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the old covenant never revoked by God (cf. Rom. 11: 29) and that of the new covenant is at the same time a dialogue within our church, that is to say, between the first and second part of her Bible. Buber said: "The covenant has not been revoked". The Pope has taken up the implied challenge, when he uses the idiom of "The people of God of the old covenant never revoked by God".

In the affiransfon of the old covenant that has not been revoked the theological reason for the church"s interest in the Jewish people becomes evident - an interest "in the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses". The "links between the church and the Jewish people are founded" - as the Pope said in another address - "on the design of the God of the covenant".[23] The interest is, therefore, of theological quality. It has pastoral effects as well, that is why the Vatican "Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" of June 24, 1985, can take up the papal word about the covenant that has not been revoked. It can speak about "a still living reality cloesely related to the Church. The Holy Father has stated this permanent reality of the Jewish people in a remarkable theological formula, in his allocution to the Jewish community of West Germany at Mainz, on November 17, 1980: "... the people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked.""[24]

There have been some irritations around the papal word in Vatican circles. They have not been able to deflect John Paul II from his theological course. Rather, he has repeated and strengthened his position at following meetings with representatives of Jewish communities.[25] It was perhaps this papal obstinacy that led to the spineless remark, "the old covenant has never been revoked", in the Catholic Catechism of 1993. In its statements about Israel and Judaism the Catechism shows a peculiar ambivalence. (No. 121; comp. also No. 839).[26]

The papal word, "God"s people of the old covenant that has never been revoked by God" is far more than a bare demonstration of good will. It is theologically well reflected and stands very central in a mesh of statements of papal doctrine about Israel: The covenant concluded with Moses has never been revoked; God has never ceased to love his people; the Jewish people stands now

as ever in an irrevocable vocation and is still the heir of that election to which God is faithful. These are the central statements and categories of the papal doctrine on Israel.[27] They are clear and actualize above all the Pauline statements in his letter to the Romans (chapter 9-11). Nevertheless, there is a problem. It is the problem of the tension between this and other statements of the New Testament - for example 2 Cor. 3 and Hebr. 8.

The problem with New Testament texts

The text of 2 Cor. 3 is determined by the motif of surpassing or exceeding the old by the new. The "new" covenant surpasses the "old" one in splendour (verses 6-11). Does such surpassing mean also the end of the old covenant? Some translations of verse 14 are maintaining this, as for example the Unity Translation: "Up to the present day that same veil (that is the veil which Moses put on his face when he descended from Sinai: Exod. 34:29-35) still lies there when the old covenant is being read, and it remains veiled until it (the old covenant) is ended in Christ." Luther translated: The veil, "which ceases in Christ". Here not the old covenant itself ceases, but the veil over the old covenant. That means: "In the "new" covenant the "old" covenant begins to shine uncovered in God"s own radiant glory. It is therefore in no way removed or has ceased or could be forgotten. The "new" covenant is nothing else but the unveiled "old" covenant that is now not covered anymore."[28]

The letter to the Hebrews seems to most clearly express the end of the old covenant: "By speaking of a new covenant, he implies that the first one is already old. Now anything old and outlived is close to disappearance" (Hebr. 8:13). The letter to the Hebrews, therefore, does not share the confidence of the letter to the Romans, whereupon the gifts of grace - among them the gift of covenant - are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). On the other hand it does not construct a simple contradiction to Paul. The relationship between both covenants is playfully, and as if in a platonic way, put in opposition as likeness or shadow and the matter itself. And that does not mean bare contrast but rather an el t of positive analogy between the first and second covenant.[29]

It is not to be denied that there exists within the New Testament a pluralism of positions about the covenant of God with Israel. That means there is an openness, into which the Pope speaks the word about the old covenant that has not been revoked. Thereby he leans linguistically mainly on the letter to the Romans. When John Paul II in his fundamental statements about the relationship of the church to the Jewish people actualizes the letter to the Romans, seeing the Jewish people on the level of its present-day identity as a particular element of the covenant, of divine love and election, aside from the church, then he points to a salvation-historical situation in a way, which overcomes traditional positions: the church and the Jewish people are on a journey before God. Both are in covenant. They share this covenant in different ways. The reality of the covenant embraces both. This is the nature of the "ecumene", in which they are joined. Obviously God wants the church and the Jewish people to walk side by side participating in the covenantal reality.[30]

Jews and Christians in covenantal partnership?

The Christian theological acknowledgment of a participation in the reality of the covenant with God of both Israel and the church has overcome a long tradition in Christian preaching and theology, according to which the old covenant of God with Israel is terminated and removed. This raises, however, at the same time new questions, which are hotly debated in a current discussion: The old and the new covenant may not be related to each other as in sequence, with the meaning of substitution, how, then, should their relationship be defined? While the cited French text of 1973 plays with several pictures (root, source, foundation) to describe the relationship, the 1980 Synod of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland says that the church has been included, through Jesus Christ, in the covenant of God with his people (Israel).[31] However, one must ask, does the Bible of Israel talk about covenant in such a way that it refers not only to the relationship between God and

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his people Israel, but that it is open for an inclusion, an implant or a calling-in of the church? Do we have an only covenant, in which Israel has priority and which has been opened to the church through inclusion, implantation or calling-in? Or do we indeed have two fundamental types of covenant, whose difference and distinction reaches so deep that the concept of one covenant becomes problematic?

However the current discussion may be accentuated in the future, mainly by Old Testament scholars, its presupposition is and will remain: the covenant of God with Israel has not been revoked or terminated.[32]

Conclusion

At the conclusion we are turning back to Martin Buber"s statement. It had been a reply, a word of opposition and contradiction, a "but" against the Christian thesis that Jews had been determined by God to enter the church. Buber"s insistence that the covenant has not been terminated called into question a church which claims the covenant only for herself. The papal word and the Christian theological thesis now state that the old covenant has never been revoked. This, however, in a strange way, again calls Israel into question. Their internal presupposition is, of course, that the church is in covenant - God in his mercy has brought those that were "afar" now "close" through Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:13) and has included the nations into Israel"s covenant. However, of this the Jewish tradition has no knowledge. It does not recognize the church"s inclusion in the covenant of God with Israel. It sees Christians solely included in God"s covenant with Noah.[33] The Jewish tradition can only see the people Israel in [God"s] covenant with Abraham and on Sinai. This is now [again] called into question through the new Christian understanding, which recognizes that the old covenant has not been terminated. The affirmation of the church that she is in covenant with God poses a problem in regards to Israel"s understanding of covenant. This should, of course, not tempt Christians to wrest consent from Jews.[34] Rather, the church"s affirmation of being in covenant is put to the test by her adherence to the fact that God"s covenant with Israel has not been terminated, despite Jewish rejection of her own understanding of covenant.

This may be translated in a picture, which returns to Buber"s word. I see Martin Buber before me on the Jewish cemetery in Worms. With him are a Catholic scholar of dogmatics and a Protestant theologian. All three of them look at the cathedral. Martin Buber says to his companions: "The cathedral is, as it is. The cemetery is, as it is. But we have not been rejected." His Christian companions answer: "You say it: Israel has not been rejected by her Lord and God."

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Footnotes

1. N. Lohfink, Der niemals gekuendigte Bund. Freiburg 1989, 21; cf. also the article of the author: Covenant, Torah and Pilrimage of the Nations to Mount Zion: SIDIC 24 (1991) No. 2-3, 3-13.
2. Theologische Blaetter 12 (1933) 272f. Also: H. H. Ben-Sasson, "Disputations and Polemics", in: Encyclopaedia Judaica. Volume 6 (Jerusalem 1978), 79-103, and G. Sauer, Eine gemeinsame Sprache der Hoffnung?: Evangelische Theologie 42 (1982) 152-171.
3. Comp. P. Lenhardt, Auftrag und Unmoeglichkeit eines legitimen christlichen Zeugnisses gegenueber den Juden, Berlin 1980, 102.
4. S. Mayer, Neueste Kirchenrechts-Sammlung. First volume 1917-1929, Freiburg 1951, 230.

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26. Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche, Munich a.o. 1993, 68 and 250. Other statements of the catechism are, of course, in tension to this, comp. Nr. 580, 710 or 762). The new catechism met with criticism as well as approval on the part of Jews. Comp. L. Klenicki, Der

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27. Comp. the analysis of John Paul"s II doctrine of Israel by E. Fisher, Pope John Paul II"s Pilgrimage of Reconciliation. Pope John Paul, 1995, XX-XXXIX.
28. N. Lohfink, 53. comp. also F. Mussner, Traktat ueber die Juden, Munich 1979, 220f.
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32. Participants in this German discussion are mainly: F. Cruesemann, N. Lohfink, F. Mussner, R. Rendtorff, E. Stegemann and E. Zenger. See: E. Zenger, Der Neue Bund im Alten. Zur Bundestheologie der beiden Testamente (Quaestions disputatae 146), Freiburg 1993; Kirche und Israel 6 (1991) vol. 2 and 9 (1994) vol 1.
33. This Jewish tradition is put forward by J. J. Petuchowski in his contribution, "Bekannte und unbekannte Gottesbuende", in: A. Falaturi / J. J. Petuchowski / W. Strolz (ed.), Universale Vaterschaft Gottes, Freiburg 1987, 13-31. This Jewish author, who died in 1991, wanted to open the [Jewish] tradition to a new understanding and interpretation in his Jewish theology of Christianity. "Without denying the eternal and binding force of the Sinai covenant, the Jew is able to recognize that already the Bible itself in the story of Noach presents a divine covenant with the whole of humanity... The Sinai covenant has supplemented the Noachitic covenant for the Jewish faith community, but not replaced it. Would it not be possible to speak, in a similar way, about the covenant of Calvary, which has opened the covenant of Sinai to a certain part of humanity, without thereby abrogating it for Israel?" (28).
34. Comp. C. Thoma, item "Bund", in.: J. J. Petuchowski / C. Thoma, Lexikon der juedisch-christlichen Begegnung, Freiburg 1989, 5640,60.

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