



The Relationship of the Old and the New Covenant as One of the Central Issues in Jewish-Christian Dialogue

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About the concept of covenant in Jewish and Christian tradition - and its meaning for Jewish-Christian dialogue

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Both Jews and Christians see themselves as God's chosen people of the covenant. But what links them also divides them. The Christian tradition distinguishes between the old and the new covenant. By claiming to be the people of the new covenant, Christians have often called into dispute the Jewish claim to be God's chosen people, and have claimed for themselves the title of sole heirs of the covenant. So in the past the issue of the covenant has often been the subject of bitter conflict. Today it is an important issue in Jewish-Christian dialogue, of course without having as yet achieved any clear result.¹

1. Covenant Theology in the Old Testament

The word "covenant" is the traditional translation of the Hebrew word *berith*.² *Berith* does not however mean a two-sided contract between equal partners but a one-sided commitment and stipulation whereby the powerful lord enters into a self-imposed obligation, while on the other hand obligations are imposed upon the passive recipient.³ We find in the Bible not just one single covenant theology but a range of different covenant theologies. The most significant are the Deuteronomic, the Priestly and the prophetic covenant theologies.⁴ In connection with the Deuteronomic concept, reference is often made to the structure of the oriental vassalage contracts which comprised for the vassal both protection and dependence. The covenant contract was the foundation of a legal system which guaranteed a dwelling place and a way of life, security and peace (*shalom*).⁵ In biblical usage however the structure and content of the vassalage contract are modified.

An initial viewpoint: God's covenant with his people is the expression of God's free election and therefore of his un-owed love for his people. The covenant is therefore not legally actionable; its guarantee consists solely in God's faithfulness to his covenant. In the Deuteronomic writings and in the prophets the covenant can be described as the marriage covenant and as a passionate loving relationship. In Hosea 2 and 11 and in Ezekiel 16 the full drama of the love and faithfulness of God persevering in the face of unfaithfulness is described very movingly. It is therefore impossible to speak of a relationship between God and mankind as one in which partners of equal status have equal rights; but God's passionate love again and again responds graciously and mercifully to the faithless behaviour of his people with divinely unconditional fidelity, and thus graciously makes room for reciprocity and for a unique form of community.⁶ The covenant

relationship is given concise expression in the statement: “I am your God – you are my people” (cf. *Lev 26:12, Jer 7:23*).

A second viewpoint: The covenant has its concrete historical reference point in the people of Israel. This people exists in history and makes its way through history. Correspondingly, we repeatedly find new covenants sealed throughout the Old Testament: the covenant with Noah, guaranteeing the perpetual existence of the order of creation (cf. *Gen 9:8-17*), the covenant with Abraham containing the pledge of the Promised Land and numerous posterity (cf. *Gen 17*), the covenant with the people of Israel on Mt Sinai and their commitment to the “Ten Words” (Decalogue) (cf. *Ex 19 f; Deut 5*). Further references include the renewal of this covenant after the entry into the Promised Land (cf. *Josh 24*) and the covenant with David and the promise that his throne will be established forever (cf. *2Sam 7:10-17*). Also important, lastly, is the renewal of the covenant after the Babylonian exile and the promise of an everlasting covenant through the prophets (cf. *Ezek 16:60, 37:26*). *Jer 31:31-34* is of particular significance because there the new covenant is expressly mentioned. It is of course a subject of debate whether this means a new covenant or a renewal of the Sinai covenant.⁷ These covenants do not stand in isolation, without any connection to one another. Each new covenant that is concluded refers back to the preceding one and restates it in current terms. Thus tradition and interpretation are in each instance interconnected.⁸

Finally, one last viewpoint: Each time the covenant is confirmed and renewed once more, God responds in his unconditional faithfulness to the constantly recurring unfaithfulness of his people. God perseveres in his commitment and renews it again and again in spite of the infidelity of his people. So again and again Israel is called to repentance and conversion (*teshuva*) (cf. *Amos 4:6-12, Is 9:12 f* and elsewhere).

This introduces a motif which recurs in the New Testament: criticism of Israel’s obduracy (cf. *Mt 23:31 f, Jn 8:24, Rom 11:28, 1Thess 2:15 f* etc). This subject does not make its first appearance in the New Testament or in the tradition of the church; it is a persistent motif already in the writings of the prophets. Anyone who would like to eradicate the corresponding passages from the New Testament must also cross out many sections of the Old Testament.⁹ The statements critical of Israel which occur in the New Testament must therefore be understood within the context of the tradition of criticism of Israel in the prophets. Thus the New Testament takes its place within the history of the tradition and interpretation of the Old Testament. It sees itself as the final and definitive reinterpretation of the covenant which God has sealed with his people once and for all.¹⁰

2. Covenant Theology in the New Testament

From a purely empirical point of view, the word *diatheke* occurs less frequently in the New Testament than *berit* in the Old. But its centrality can nevertheless be deduced from the fact that it occurs in the earliest New Testament tradition and in such a central context as the four Lord’s Supper narratives (cf. *1Cor 11:25, Mk 14:24, Mt 26:28, Lk 22:20*).¹¹

It is generally accepted that there are two strands of tradition: on the one hand Mark-Matthew, on the other Paul-Luke. Both traditions converge at the point where they, with the words “for the many” and “for you”, take up the idea of the representative expressed in the fourth song of God’s servant (*Is 52:13 – 53:12*), and establish a link between the covenant idea and the representative self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Mark – Matthew speaks of the blood of the covenant (cf. *Mk 14:24, Mt 26:28*) and thereby interprets the Lord’s Supper event in the sense of the priestly tradition of the blood of the covenant that was shed at Sinai (cf. *Ex 24:8*). According to the archaic concept, blood engenders a binding community, therefore by sharing in the one blood of the covenant all are incorporated together into the covenant of God with his people.¹² Paul-Luke speaks of “the new covenant in my blood” (*Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25*); by employing the blood symbolism they at the same time take up the prophetic promise of a new covenant (cf. *Jer 31:31*).

Thus the Lord's Supper narratives and their covenant theology on the one hand are located within a continuum with the Old Testament, while on the other hand, with their Christological focus they give expression to the crucial point of conflict with Judaism – the point which led the representatives of Judaism of the time to reject the message of Jesus and to condemn him, followed ultimately by the breach between Judaism and Christianity. This Christological focus and the realisation of the new covenant¹³ as promised by the prophets for the messianic end times is of course not an ecclesiological realisation: at no time is it claimed that the congregation of disciples or the church are the promised new people of God. The Lord's Supper narratives instead look forward to the eschatological consummation in the coming kingdom of God (cf. *Lk 22:16 par*). With regard to the church therefore, there remains an as yet unfulfilled balance of the prophetic promise. The early Christian Eucharistic cry "*Maran atha*" (cf. *1Cor 16:22, Did 10,6*) gives expression to this tension between the already realised and the still unfulfilled eschatology.

Fundamental for further developments are the statements of the Apostle Paul. In the second Epistle to the Corinthians he compares the service of the new covenant (*diatheke*) with that of the old covenant; one functions as the letter which kills while the other is the spirit which gives life (cf. *2Cor 3:6.14.17*). In a similar fashion in the Epistle to the Galatians he describes the relationship between the two testaments (*diatheka*). The one testament has its origins at Sinai and brings slavery, it corresponds to the Jerusalem of the day; the other belongs to the heavenly Jerusalem and brings freedom, so that we are no longer children of the bondmaid but children of the freewoman (cf. *Gal 4:21-31*).

That does not mean that the new covenant simply abolishes the old and declares it null and void.¹⁴ Paul does not see a gulf between the two as Marcion does later. Instead he says of the Israelites: they have "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law" (*Rom 9:4; cf. 3:1 f*); "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (*7:12*). God's word has not become ineffective (cf. *9:6*). God has not rejected his people (cf. *11:1 f*). "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (*11:29*). Despite the discontinuities therefore a fundamental continuity is maintained between the New and the Old Testament on the basis of God's unswerving and unconditional fidelity. God is faithful, he has not abandoned his people.

The problem of continuity and discontinuity becomes acute with the complex issue of the law. Even in the Old Testament the promulgation of the law is never defined as *berit*.¹⁵ Paul therefore interprets correctly when he defines the law as "entering" later (*Rom 5:20*). It is a legal form of the covenant, conditional and for a limited time, which – as Psalm 119 reiterates again and again with new variations – provides light and orientation for life's path. For Paul the starting point is not the Sinai covenant but the covenant with Abraham. That is directed towards all peoples (cf. *Gen 12:3; 17:4* etc); this universality must not be delimited by a law which is restricted to Israel.¹⁶ On the cross Christ as our representative has fulfilled the law for us once and for all (cf. *Rom 3:21-26; Gal 3:13; 4:4 f*); he is thus the goal and the end of the law (cf. *Rom 10:4; Gal 3:24*).¹⁷ Thus Christ has rescinded the exclusion of the Gentiles and given them access to the covenant; he has created peace and united and reconciled Jews and Gentiles in his person (cf. *Eph 2:11-22*).

Thus Paul can say that in Christ Jesus all promises have become Yea and Amen (cf. *2Cor 1:20*). In Christ the old covenant has not been abolished but has come into force in its definitive form, concentrating on its essence and accomplishing the universality implicit at its inception. So it has been upheld or elevated in a sense which is to be understood dialectically.

Here it becomes clear what the New Testament means by the word "new" when it speaks of a new covenant (cf. *Lk 22:20, 1Cor 11:25, 2Cor 3:6, Heb 9:15*). "New" does not mean an historical innovation nor a reforming renewal but an eschatological qualification. New is the "epitome of the wholly different and miraculous thing brought by the time of salvation";¹⁸ the new does not abolish the old but brings about its fulfilment once and for all. In this sense the New Testament sees itself

as the eschatological fulfilment and therefore definitive reinterpretation of the Old Testament covenant promise.¹⁹

3. The long-lived substitution theory.

In the later writings of the New Testament and in the immediate post-Apostolic writings the emphasis is placed differently. This development is linked to historical developments. For Paul the situation was in principle still open. After the Jewish War and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, post-biblical rabbinical Judaism was constituted; this was achieved by dissociating itself from Christianity as it expanded. The Christians were excluded from the synagogue, cursed with the so-called heretics' blessing, persecuted and in extreme cases killed.²⁰ In the same context Christianity definitively established its own identity by dissociating itself from Judaism. That led to a permanent state of conflict between perpetuating the tradition of the old covenant and contradicting the Jewish interpretation of that covenant. In the course of this conflict the Jews were ultimately stripped of their status as the people of the covenant, and that role was claimed exclusively by the church – identifying itself as the new people of the covenant – as the “new Israel”.²¹

There have often been attempts to locate this substitution theory in the Epistle to the Hebrews.²² But the Epistle to the Hebrews is not directed outwards to the Jews but within, to the Christians who have become weary and uncertain. Its purpose is to strengthen their faith and to encourage them to persevere, by pointing to Christ Jesus as the true and ultimate high priest, the mediator of the new covenant. One can put one's trust in him, in contrast to the shadowy prefiguration of the Levitical cult (cf. *Heb 7-8*).

It is this context which must be understood when the Epistle sets up the contrast between the first purely earthly covenant and a second better (cf. *Heb 8:7*) and new covenant (cf. *9:15, 12:24*). The first covenant is defined as outdated, in decline and doomed to obsolescence (cf. *8:13*), while the second covenant is defined as everlasting (cf. *13:20*). To establish the foundations of this contrast the Epistle refers to the promise of a new covenant in *Jer 31:31-34* (cf. *Heb 8:8-12*). This demonstrates that the Epistle to the Hebrews has no intention of proving the promises of the old covenant to be false, but on the contrary treats them as valid. The reference to the Old Testament promises is intended to help Christians to be sure of their salvation in Christ.²³ At issue in the Epistle to the Hebrews is not the contrast of the old and new covenants as we understand them today, nor a contrast between the church and Judaism, but a contrast between the eternal heavenly priesthood of Christ and the transitory earthly Levitical priesthood.

The fundamental issue in the Epistle to the Hebrews in its new situation is similar to that of the synoptic Gospels in the Lord's Supper narratives, and to Paul: that is, a Christological interpretation of the new covenant. But it is precisely this Christian interpretation which in this new situation finds itself in conflict with the rabbinical interpretation.

The Epistle of Barnabas (around 130 AD) took the step from Christological interpretation to the express negation of the Jewish claim. Here the issue is the direct question: To whom does the testament belong (cf. *4:6*)? The answer is clear: The Jews have gambled away and lost the testament because of their sins, now the Christians are the “hereditary people” (cf. *4:7 f; 14:1-5*). Thus the Sunday has taken the place of the Sabbath, and the spiritual temple in the hearts of the Christians has taken the place of the stone temple of the Jews (cf. *15-16*).

In the “Dialogue with Tryphon” Justin Martyr followed this path to its end. The Christological focus and the consequent negation of the Jewish claim have been transformed into the substitution of the old covenant by the new. While Barnabas was concerned with the question of the ownership of the testament, the old covenant is now seen as in opposition to the new, and declared annulled by

the new universal covenant (cf. 11:2). The old covenant has reached its end and its goal in Christ Jesus (cf. 43:1). Christ is the new covenant in person (cf. 122:6) and the Christians are the sons and heirs (cf. 140:1). Here the decisive step has been taken from Christological focus to ecclesiological substitution.

This substitution theory has been influential within the Christian tradition. The old covenant was seen as merely prefiguring and preparing the way for the new covenant, it was denied any significance on its own account, let alone any continuing relevance much less a remaining balance of its promise projected into the future. Correspondingly post-biblical rabbinical Judaism was viewed as an outdated and obsolete religion. The relationship between the old and the new covenant was interpreted in the sense of promise and fulfilment, as authoritatively established by Irenaeus of Lyon.²⁴

Even critical biblical scholars were unable to free themselves from this interpretative model until the most recent past. As examples one can refer to Gerhard Kittel, the first editor of the influential "Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament", to Martin Noth, the author of the standard work "Geschichte Israels", and to Rudolf Bultmann, for many the epitome of the critical liberal exegete. In many forms of liberation theology and feminist theology too the anti-Judaism of the substitution theory has continued its long and tenacious existence until well into the 20th century.²⁵

The two statues on Strasbourg Cathedral are typical of this relationship. On the one side the Synagogue with her eyes blindfolded because she is blind to the truth of Christ, on the other the triumphant Ecclesia who looks toward the future with her eyes wide open.

4. The epochal turning-point in the theology after Auschwitz

The substitution theory has to confront the question how the thesis of the abrogation of the covenant can be reconciled with God's unconditional faithfulness as testified in both the Old and the New Testaments, or with his constantly renewed readiness to forgive. Quite early on there were some particularly clear-sighted theologians who made reference to the quite different tone of the statements of the Apostle Paul in Romans 11.23

But the situation did not change until after the Second World War, on the basis of the horror at the unprecedented murder of millions of European Jews planned and organised by the state and carried out with technological means, the Shoah; this was combined with the feeling of shame that Christian anti-Judaism was, while not the cause, an attitudinal prerequisite for the expansion of neo-pagan anti-Semitism and the lack of resistance of most Christians. This insight led to a fundamental theological re-evaluation, in which the "theology after Auschwitz" in its different variants led to a revision of the Christian relationship to Judaism and the theological foundations of this relationship; a change of perspective which can only be described as an epoch-making break with the past.²⁷

With reference to our problem the question reads: Is the old covenant only a prefiguration and precursor of the new covenant, and has it been fulfilled in the new covenant to the extent that it can no longer claim any significance of its own? Or is there still a balance of promise from the old covenant which has not yet been fulfilled in the new covenant, and can it be accorded any lasting significance?

The Catholic Church took up this question at the official level at the Second Vatican Council in the declaration "*Nostra Aetate*" (1965). In this declaration the Church expressed regret for every form of anti-Semitism, it affirmed its Jewish roots and, with reference to the Epistle to the Romans, the continued validity of God's covenant with Israel.

“Nevertheless, according to the Apostle, the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues (cf. *Rom 11:28-29*). In company with the prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and ‘serve him with one accord’ (*Zeph 3:9*)” (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 4).

Pope John Paul II above all has contributed decisively towards achieving the breakthrough with this declaration, which can only be defined as historic, as well as to expanding and intensifying it. He has often repeated the term of the “unabrogated covenant” and made it the foundation of the redefinition of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism.²⁸ Thus “*Nostra Aetate*” opened a new chapter in the predominantly dark history of the relationship between Jews and Christians. It represents a new beginning which has in the meantime found broad resonance in many declarations and official statements at Bishops’ Conferences, Synods and Ecclesial Commissions.²⁹ In the meantime the term “unabrogated covenant” has become the starting point and foundation of a renewed theology of Judaism within both Catholic and Protestant theology.³⁰ In place of the treatises “*Contra Judaeis*” we now find treatises “*De Judaeis*” or “*Pro Judaeis*”. For more recent theology Judaism is not only sociologically but also theologically a current entity. God’s covenant with Israel has not been overtaken and replaced by the new covenant. God has not abrogated his covenant with this people; he has not rejected or forgotten his people. God is still inclined towards these his people in love and faithfulness, in mercy, judgement and forgiveness; he is with them and among them in the difficult hours and times of their history above all. As a member of his people, each Jew continues to stand beneath the promise.

5. One covenant or two covenants?

“*Nostra Aetate*” was a necessary and a good new beginning, and the Catholic Church can never retreat back to the previous position. “*Nostra Aetate*” was of course only the beginning of a new beginning. We are only at the start of a new start of a “Christian Theology of Judaism”; despite many good initiatives such a theology of Judaism still remains a desideratum. Many decisive questions still remain open.

Many recent approaches overlook the fact that both Judaism and Christianity cannot simply be equated with their biblical forms. Post-biblical rabbinical Judaism was formed only after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD by differentiating itself from aspiring Christianity and excluding the Christians from the synagogue. On the other hand, Christianity also had to differentiate itself from Judaism. In the form in which they exist today, both are post-biblical entities.³¹ The Pauline statements, which are at home in a different historical context, cannot be directly applied to their reciprocal relationship, that is, not without the necessary intermediate hermeneutical considerations. In addition, the biblical testimony is multi-layered and proves resistant to a systematic standardisation. The term “unabrogated covenant”, which has been so important in the new initiatives, should therefore not be regarded in isolation; it does not cover the whole multi-layered New Testament covenant theology. We are still far removed from a synthesis and even more from a consensus.

The central question which Jewish-Christian dialogue revolves around for us is: How can the thesis of the continuing covenant be reconciled with the uniqueness and universality of Christ Jesus, which are constitutive for the Christian understanding of the new covenant? Can or should we replace the exclusivism of the substitution theory with a dualism in the sense of a co-existence of the old and new covenants, or even a pluralism in the sense of a number of covenants? Giving up the claim to the universal truth and salvation of Christ Jesus would be equivalent to giving up Christianity itself.³² So in this question Christology remains the real stumbling block.

In attempting to answer this question two theories have been developed during the past decades:

the One Covenant Theory and the Two Covenant Theory.³³ The question is: Is there only one covenant which encompasses both Jews and Christians? Or should we speak of two covenants which exist in an alternative, a correlative or a dialectical relationship to one another? Both theories are represented by both Catholic and Protestant theologians with many modifications, transitions and intermediate positions.

The One Covenant Theory correctly maintains the unity of God's plan of salvation, but it presumes a unified canonical biblical covenant concept which does not exist in this form. It stands in danger of either claiming Judaism for Christianity or making Christianity into a sort of reformed Judaism, thus obscuring either the particularity of Judaism or the uniqueness and universality of Christ Jesus. The Two Covenant Theory avoids these dangers. Its strength is that it can maintain the relative autonomy of Judaism and Christianity. Even if it wishes to maintain the interconnectedness of Judaism and Christianity, this is not totally successful; it runs the risk of considering the two as totally independent entities. It must therefore on the one hand play down the Jewish roots of the church while on the other hand failing to do justice to the universal Christological claim.

The relationship of Judaism and Christianity is thus so complex both historically and theologically that it cannot be reduced to one of the two theories or to a formula which is valid for all time.³⁴ Many more recent versions get no further than an indecisive "both – and".³⁵ Progress can only be made in this situation if one takes into account the hermeneutical and theological presuppositions of the entire discussion.

Since Judaism and Christianity have followed different paths we can no longer make direct connections with Paul. Judaism and Christianity have developed two different interpretations which one cannot judge from a neutral standpoint if one considers them as a theologian and not as a religious studies scholar. Both are derived from a faith decision. At the heart of the Christian faith is the affirmation of Jesus as the Christ in whom all the promises of the old covenant have become Yea and Amen (cf. *2Cor 1:20*). Therefore it is the fundamental hermeneutical presupposition of Christian theology to read the promises of the old covenant in the light of their Christological fulfilment. It establishes a connection with the old covenant while at the same time contradicting the Jewish claim to the same covenant promises.³⁶ That does not lead back to the substitution theory, unless the Christological interpretation is inadvertently turned into an ecclesiological interpretation, that is, if the balance of promise from the Old Testament is taken seriously and the eschatological difference between the fulfilment which has *already* been accomplished in Christ Jesus and the *still* anticipated consummation is held open. This difference leaves room for the "still" of the continuing validity of the covenant with Israel, and allows us to take up Romans 11 anew so that we can approach an answer to the question which occupies us here.

6. Historical concurrence on the basis of eschatological hope

The answer which Romans 11 gives us is not a theory, but rather an image. Images are also better suited to expressing the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, of connection and contradiction – which can scarcely be held in balance conceptually – and to bringing the dialectic to a standstill as it were.³⁷ Images also have the advantage of being open to interpretation and not prescribing how they are to be understood in the same way that concepts do. Images can therefore legitimately be applied interpretatively to different situations.

In the Epistle to the Romans Paul uses the image of the root of the olive tree for Israel into which the church of the Gentiles is grafted like a branch. The root bears the branches and gives them sustenance (cf. *Rom 11:16-24*). With this image Paul resists any Christian triumphalism. "It is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you" (*11:18*). The church is forever dependent on Israel, it cannot turn away from or against Israel without cutting itself off from its roots, thus damaging and weakening itself. If it does so all the same, it denies and harms itself. "For salvation

is from the Jews" (*Jn 4:22*).

According to Franz Rosenzweig the Christian needs the Jew standing behind him.³⁸ Holding fast to the Old Testament during the formation of the canon preserved Christianity from sliding into Gnosticism and sharpened its awareness that it was anchored in history and in the physicality of the salvation story.³⁹ "*Caro cardo salutis*" (Tertullian). Traditional theological anti-Judaism has cut the church off from its bearing and sustaining root, and has led to its impoverishment and weakening. This was one of the causes for the fact that most Christians did not oppose the crime of the Shoah with the resistance which one could have expected from them.

But Franz Rosenzweig also knows the reverse danger posed by Judaism cutting itself off in its self-sufficiency and closing the door to dialogue.⁴⁰ For Judaism cannot simply be indifferent to the branch of Christianity which was grafted into the Jewish rootstock and has in the meantime grown into a great tree, without denying a part of itself. For the promise given to Abraham that all the nations are blessed in him (cf. *Gen 12:3* etc) has made its way toward fulfilment by way of Christianity.⁴¹

On this pathway fundamental faith constructs of Judaism have been universalised, and Jewish monotheism, the Ten Commandments, and its messianic hope have been exported to the world. In more recent times that has often occurred in a secularised form leading to the contemporary utopias and the modern belief in progress; the resulting consequences are the cause of the crises destabilising the modern world. Jews and Christians therefore share a common responsibility for the future of the world. Both together are called to work towards an order of peace with justice.⁴²

Thus Jews and Christians are different but dependent upon one another for the sake of their individual identity. They are like two brothers who have the same father in heaven and in Abraham the same father in faith. They can become alienated and hostile brothers, and unfortunately that has often been the case. But they can also acknowledge and find one another again as Joseph found his brothers again after a long history of guilt and betrayal (cf. *Gen 45*). A similar process of rediscovery and reunion is in its initial stages in Jewish-Christian dialogue. This is not possible without repentance and rethinking.

In the end the relationship of Israel and the church is a mystery of election and judgement, of guilt and even greater grace, which Paul is able to approach only with doxology (cf. *Rom 11:33-36*). The continuing existence of Israel confronts us inevitably with God's unconditional faithfulness to his people. The existence of the church is also a mystery, for without deserving it, out of pure grace, God's covenant commitment has been extended to the Gentiles. So the relationship of Israel and the church is an absolute mystery.

A mystery is not an irrational entity which we are forbidden to think about, instead it is true that: "*Fides quaerens intellectum*" (Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury). Paul himself in Romans 11 indicates the direction of such an understanding; not a theory but a *docta spes*, an account of the hope (cf. *1Pet 3:15 f*) which is certain that in the end Israel and the church will be reunited (cf. *Rom 11:26.32*).

The rationality of this hope is found in both the Jewish and the Christian tradition. It is the shared conviction that God will in the end reveal his divinity and establish his kingdom. According to Jewish belief the Torah was created before the world and the world was created according to the measure of the Torah.⁴³ This universal destiny of the historically particular Torah finds expression in the promise of the gathering of all peoples at the end of time and of Jahweh's eschatological rule over all peoples. According to this hope at the end of days Jews and Gentiles will stand shoulder to shoulder and await the Messiah. "On that day the Lord will be one and his name one" (*Zech 14:9*).⁴⁴

In the New Testament Christ Jesus has taken the place of the Torah.⁴⁵ All creation has been directed toward him and in him everything finds its fulfilment (cf. *Jn 1:3-4.10; Col 1:16 f*). In the church consisting of Jews and Gentiles (cf. *Eph 2:11-22*) the eschatological gathering of the peoples has already begun (cf. *Is 2:2-5; Mic 4:1-5; Mt 8:11; Lk 13:29*), but the promise made to Abraham has not yet been fulfilled completely. The remaining balance of the promise will only be fulfilled when in the end Israel too is saved (cf. *Rom 11:2.32*) and “God may be all in all” (*1Cor 15:28*).

Jews and Christians share a common root with one another and a common hope for one another. Regardless of the Christological difference they are, in the current eschatological interim, two concurrent parts of God’s one people on the basis of guilt and even greater grace, co-existing as rivals in the positive as well as in the conflict-ridden sense of the word. They have to follow the path of history beside one another. Co-existence can turn into bloody conflict and aggressive contradiction, but it can also become mutually enriching complementarity and mutually assisting cooperation. Both are possible and both have occurred within history. But fundamentally neither Christians nor Jews (cf. *Rom 11:18*) can achieve consummation (cf. *Heb 11:40*) without one another.

Therefore, following the catastrophe of the Shoah, Jews and Christians should – without giving up their differences – overcome the alienation and animosity which derives from their differentness, and seek to realise their shared hope in anticipation already within history. They should stand “shoulder to shoulder” with one another and be there for one another, committing themselves to justice (*zedaka*) and peace (*shalom*) for the good of all. Thus they can be a blessing to one another and the world.

I cannot summarise this thought better than with the words of Martin Buber:

There is a way of walking together without coming together. There is a way of working together without living together. There is a way of unifying the prayers without unifying those who are praying. ... Intentions which will meet at their goal have their nameless alliance in their orientation, differentiated on the basis of their truths but shared on the basis of the reality of fulfilment. We must not pre-empt, but we should prepare the way.⁴⁶

Notes

1. On this subject as a whole: Comité épiscopal français pour les relations avec le Judaïsme, Lire l’ancien Testament. Contribution à une lecture catholique de l’Ancien Testament pour permettre le dialogue entre juifs et chrétiens, Paris 1997; Pont. Commissio Biblica, Le peuple juif et ses Écritures dans la Bible chrétienne, Città del Vaticano 2001; J. Ratzinger, “La nuova alleanza. Sulla teologia dell’alleanza nel Nuovo Testamento”, in: La Chiesa, Israele e le religioni del mondo, Torino 2000, 27-48.
2. The LXX translates *berith* with *diateke* (stipulation, regulation), Latin *testamentum* (last will and testament), Aquila and Symmachus on the other hand translate it with *syntheke* (contract), Hieronymus in the Vulgate with *foedus* or *pactum* (sealed covenant, contract). Cf. E. Kutsch, Article „*Berit* - Verpflichtung“, in: Jenni-Westermann, Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, München-Zürich 1978, 352.
3. E. Kutsch, *ibid.*, 339-344.
4. Overview in F.-L. Hossfeld, Article “Bund II“, in: LThK II (1994) 781-785; W. Groß, Zukunft für Israel. Alttestamentliche Bundeskonzepte und die aktuelle Debatte um den Neuen Bund (Stuttgarter Biblische Studien, Bd. 176), Stuttgart 1998.

5. See Quell, Article "*Diatheke*", in: THWNT Bd.2, 1935, 112-120.
6. In this connection J. Ratzinger, op. cit., 30 f and 47 f rightly gives consideration to the question of overcoming substantial thinking in favour of a relational and in the last analysis trinitarian ontology.
7. Cf. W. Groß, „Der neue Bund in Jer 31 und die Suche nach übergreifenden Bundeskonzeptionen im Alten Testament“, in: ThQ 176 (1996) 259-272.
8. This is the thesis of G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols., 6th edition, München 1969.1975.
9. Cf. Pont. Commissio Biblica, *Le peuple juif et ses Écritures dans la Bible chrétienne*, 164-189.
10. G. von Rad, op. cit. Bd. 2, 339-356. Similarly H. Gese, *Vom Sinai zum Zion. Alttestamentliche Beiträge zur biblischen Theologie*, München 1974.
11. It is not possible here to enter into the very substantial literature on the Lord's Supper narratives. Cf. the overview in X. Léon-Dufour, Article "Abendmahl I", in: LThK Bd. 1 (1993) 30-34 and F. Hahn, Article "Abendmahl I", in: RGG Bd. 1 (1998) 10-15.
12. L. Coenen, Article "*Diatheke, Bund*", in: *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*, ed. L Coenen, Bd. 1, 4th edition 1977, 160.
13. See W. Gross and H. Lichtenberger – St. Schreiner in: ThQ 1976 (1996) 259-272 and 272-290.
14. H. Merklein has demonstrated this in „Der (neue) Bund als Thema der paulinischen Theologie“, in: ThQ 176 (1996) 290-308.
15. E. Kutsch, op. cit. 350.
16. On this universal dimension which encompasses all peoples cf. U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (EKK, IV/2), Zürich-Vluyn 1980, 269.281.
17. On this double meaning of *telos* in *Rom* 10:4, cf. U. Wilckens, op. cit. 222 f.
18. Behm, Article „*Kainos*“, in: ThWNT Bd. 3 (1938) 451; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1966) Vol. III 449.
19. In view of the theologically significant biblical word "new" it is not advisable that the distinction between old and new covenant be replaced by the terms first and second covenant, thereby suggesting the idea of two covenants. See C. Westermann – E. Zenger, *Das Erste Testament. Die jüdische Bibel und die Christen*, Düsseldorf 1991.
20. Cf. *Mt* 10:17, *Lk* 21:12, *Jn* 9:22, 12:42, 16:2.
21. On this development cf. K. Backhaus, „Das Bundesmotiv in der frühkirchlichen Schwellenzeit“, in: *Der ungekündigte Bund?*, ed. H. Frankemölle (QD 172), Freiburg i. Br. 1998, 211-231.
22. E. Grässer, *An die Hebräer* (EKK XVII/2), Zürich-Vluyn 1993, 106-108; an opposing view on good grounds M. Theobald, „Zwei Bünde und ein Gottesvolk“, in: ThQ 176 (1996) 309-325.
23. E. Grässer, op. cit. 108; M. Theobald, op.cit. 313; K. Backhaus, op. cit. 217-222.
24. Irenäus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses* IV, 36, 1. On further developments cf. J. Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri*, Paris 1950, and H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, Paris 1959-1964.
25. References in J. T. Pawlikowski, „Ein Bund oder zwei Bünde? Zeitgenössische Perspektiven“, in: ThQ 176 (1996) 326 f.
26. On the Catholic side Ch. Journet, J. Daniélou, H. U. von Balthasar, on the Protestant side K. Barth and D. Bonhoeffer, also the philosopher J. Maritain. Individual witnesses like G. Luckner and B. Lichtenberg should also not be forgotten.
27. J. B. Metz, Article „*Auschwitz* II“, in: LThK Bd. 1 (1993) 1260 f.
28. The texts are collected and annotated in B. L. Sherwin – H. Kasimow (eds.), *John Paul II and the Interreligious Dialogue*, New York 1999, 125-166.
29. Several outstanding bishops should be mentioned individually: A. Bea, J. Willebrands, J. Bernadin, J. M. Lustiger. The pronouncements by the church are collected in the volumes: *Die Kirchen und das Judentum*. Bd.1: *Dokumente von 1945-1985*, eds. R. Rendtorff and H. H. Henrix, Paderborn-München 1988; Bd. 2: *Dokumente von 1986-2000*, eds. H. H. Henrix

and W. Kraus, Paderborn-München 2001.

30. Exegetes like A. Fitzmeyer, K. Stendahl, C. Martini, F. Mussner, C. Westermann, N. Lohfink and E. Zenger should be mentioned; as representatives of systematic theology one should name: J. M. Oesterreicher, C. Thoma, J. B. Metz, J. Ratzinger, J. T. Pawlikowski, J. Moltmann, H. Vorgrimler among others. Precursors and partners on the Jewish side are: L. Baeck, M. Buber, F. Rosenzweig, J. Isaak, D. Flusser, Schalom Ben-Chorim, E. L. Ehrlich, E. Fackenheim, E. Lévinas, R. J. Zvi Werblowski, J. Petuchowski, P. Lapide, L. Klenicki, M. Signer among others; cf. The anthology: *Der ungekündigte Bund? Antworten des Neuen Testaments*, ed. H. Frankemölle (QD 172), Freiburg i. Br. 1998.
31. It is therefore questionable whether one can speak of an asymmetrical relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the sense that Christianity cannot be defined without Judaism but Judaism can be defined without Christianity. The Israel of the Old Testament is indeed the root onto which church has been grafted; but this cannot simply be carried over to post-biblical rabbinical Judaism. Historically speaking we are dealing here not so much with a mother-daughter-relationship as with a relationship between two sisters or twins. Cf. H. H. Henrix, in: *Dialog oder Monolog?*, ed. A. Gerhards and H. H. Henrix (QD 208), Freiburg i. Br. 2004, 18 f, and the literature overview by M. Morgenstern, „Mutter? Schwester? Tochter?“, in: FAZ, 22. September 2004, 8.
32. Thus we find in P. van Buren, *Eine Theologie des christlich-jüdischen Diskurses*, München 1988, substantial modifications of the New Testament belief in Christ.
33. Overview in J. T. Pawlikowski, Article „Judentum und Christentum“, in: TRE Bd. 17 (1988) 390-402; Pawlikowski, „Ein oder zwei Bünde?“, in: ThQ 176 (1996) 325-340. Pawlikowski also refers to the pluralistic model which accepts the possibility of a number of revelation experiences. The latter thesis is found for example in R. Radford Ruether and in P. Knitter. Other models are named by B. Klappert: the Substitution, Typology, Illustration and Subsumption Models, and as positive models the Dialogic and the Messianic Complementary Model, and the Christological Dependence Model (cited according to F. Mussner, *Traktat über die Juden*, München 1979, 72 f).
34. W. Groß has demonstrated this exegetically on the basis of detailed analyses, op. cit. 169-188.
35. References in H. Vorgrimler, „Der ungekündigte Bund“, in: *Der ungekündigte Bund?*, 241-243.
36. I therefore find it questionable whether one can take up a neutral stance above both positions and speak of a two-fold conclusion to the Old Testament.
37. M. Signer, „Der Riß, der verbindet. Hermeneutische Zugänge zum Verhältnis von Juden und Christen“, in: *Wie Juden und Christen einander sehen*, ed. H. Immenkötter, Augsburg 2001, 11-28.
38. F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösten*, 4th. edition, Haag 1976, 460.
39. See F. Mussner, op. cit. 80-82.
40. F. Rosenzweig, op.cit 452 f.
41. J. M. Lustiger, *La Promesse*, Paris 2002, 210-218, has rightly drawn attention to this point.
42. F. Mussner, op. cit. 383-386 speaks of the „Shalomisation of the world“.
43. C. Thoma, *Das Messiasprojekt. Theologie jüdisch-christlicher Begegnung*, Augsburg 1994, 72.
44. Cf. *ibid.*, 106. Some exegetes also interpret Ps 25,14 and Ps 100,3 in the sense of an inclusion of the Gentiles within the covenant at the end of time.
45. H Gese has shown in „Der Johannesprolog“ in *Zur biblischen Theologie*, München 1977, 182-185, how the wisdom which according to Sir 24,7-12 had found a resting-place in Israel and in the Torah, has in the New Testament taken up its dwelling in the Logos which has become man (Jn 1,14).
46. Quoted in K. Backhaus, op. cit. 230 f.

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Cambridge, England, 6 December 2004. Cardinal Walter Kasper is President of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

[Report of Cambridge Conference on "Covenant"](#)