



## Theological Questions and Perspectives in Jewish-Catholic Dialogue

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### 1. A complex history between Christians and Jews

The history of relations between Christians and Jews represents a very complex history which alternates between proximity and distance, between fraternity and estrangement, between love and hate. This history can be designated as complex from its very beginnings. On the one hand, Jesus cannot be understood without Judaism; the early Christian congregation quite naturally participated in the Jewish liturgy in the temple, and Paul too on his various mission journeys always went to the synagogues first before turning to the Gentiles with his proclamation of the gospel. On the other hand, the schism between synagogue and church forms the first split in the history of the church, which the Catholic theologian Erich Przywara defined as the “primal rift.”<sup>[1]</sup> Even though contemporary research tends to accept that the process of estrangement and dissociation between Judaism and Christianity extended over a longer period than previously assumed and surely only gradually took shape during the second century after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD,<sup>[2]</sup> there is nevertheless no question that this process was set in place at the very beginning of Jewish-Christian relations and the relationship between Jews and Christians was marked by conflict already at an early stage. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger outlined that conflict in these words: “The church was regarded by her mother as an unnatural daughter, while the Christians regarded the mother as blind and obstinate.”<sup>[3]</sup> While this image reminds us that the conflicts between Jews and Christians were still like family quarrels, the relationship between Jews and Christians deteriorated progressively as the awareness of belonging to the same family was gradually lost. It has therefore in the course of history been exposed to great strain and hostility which has in many cases unfortunately led to anti-Jewish attitudes involving outbreaks of violence and pogroms against the Jews.

Hostility towards the Jews reached its lowest nadir in the history of Europe with the mass murder of European Jews planned and executed with industrial perfection by the National Socialists. The Shoah cannot and should not however be attributed to Christianity as such: it was in fact led by a godless, anti-Christian and neo-pagan ideology. The Goebbels diaries at the latest have brought to light the fact that Hitler hated Christianity just as much as Judaism, and that he saw in Catholicism above all the virtual Trojan Horse of Judaism within Christianity.<sup>[4]</sup> If the Shoah must therefore be judged as the horrific nadir of a heathen world view which intended to annihilate not only Judaism but also the Jewish heritage in Christianity, one can also understand that Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau wished to give expression to this fatal connection: “By destroying Israel they ultimately wanted to tear up the taproot of the Christian faith and to replace it with a faith of their own invention: faith in the rule of man, the rule of the powerful.”<sup>[5]</sup> In these words by the Pope one should not see, as has so often been done, an evasion of the guilty complicity of Christians, but rather recognise his conviction that Christianity is most profoundly rooted in Judaism, and that Christianity could not exist without these vital Jewish

roots.[\[6\]](#)

Even though the primitive racist anti-Semitism of the Nazi ideology, which had of course developed already in the 19th century, has nothing in common with Christianity, we Christians nevertheless have every cause to remember our complicity in the horrific developments, and above all to confess that Christian resistance to the boundless inhuman brutality of ideologically-based National Socialist racism did not display that vigour and clarity which one should by rights have expected. Resistance by Christians may well have also been so inadequate because a Christian theological anti-Judaism had been in effect for centuries, fostering a widespread anti-Semitic apathy against the Jews. Thus an ancient anti-Jewish legacy was embedded in the furrows of the souls of not a few Christians.[\[7\]](#) With shame we Christians must also acknowledge that Hitler, with his joint rejection of both Judaism and Christianity, had grasped the true essence of Christianity and its intrinsic relationship with Judaism better than not a few Christians themselves. This shared National Socialist hostility should have aroused among us Christians much more empathetic compassion than in fact did come into effect.

We Christians must therefore honestly deplore the fact that only the unprecedented atrocity of the Shoah was able to effect a real turning point in thinking. In this regard the 4th chapter of the Second Vatican Council declaration “Nostra aetate”, which the German Cardinal Augustin Bea was commissioned to prepare and which was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965 after controversial discussions, enabled a fundamental new beginning in the relationship between Jews and Christians.[\[8\]](#) With this declaration the Second Vatican Council not only repudiated and condemned all outbreaks of hatred, persecutions, slanders and manifestations of force which have been directed against the Jews on the part of so-called Christians. In a positive sense the Council also affirmed the shared patrimony of Jews and Christians and pointed to the Jewish roots of Christianity. Finally the Council expressed the ardent desire that the reciprocal understanding and the resulting mutual respect of Jews and Christians be fostered.

This instruction, given three times in “Nostra aetate”, has been reaffirmed and reinforced on a number of occasions by the popes in the period since the Council, not least through the visits to the Great Synagogue in Rome by Pope John Paul II on 13 April 1986 and by Pope Benedict XVI on 17 January 2010. The epoch-making new course set by the Council regarding the relationship between Jews and Christians has naturally been put to the test repeatedly. On the one hand the scourge of anti-Semitism seems to be ineradicable in today’s world; and even in Christian theology the age-old Marcionism and anti-Judaism re-emerge with a vengeance again and again, and in fact not only on the part of the traditionalists but also on the liberal side, for example when Jesus’ conflict with the Judaism of his day is seen as grounded in the Torah, which is misinterpreted as slavish adherence to external observances from which Jesus brought liberation. In view of such developments the church is obliged to denounce anti-Judaism and Marcionism as a betrayal of its own Christian faith, and to call to mind that the spiritual kinship between Jews and Christians has its firm and eternal foundation in Holy Scripture. On the other hand, the demand by the Second Vatican Council to foster mutual understanding and respect between Jews and Christians must continue to be accorded due attention. That is the indispensable prerequisite for guaranteeing not only that there will be no recurrence of the dangerous estrangement between Christians and Jews, but also that the regained understanding of the Jewish roots of Christianity does not lapse once more into oblivion.

## **2. Unity and difference between Judaism and Christianity**

This task proves to be urgently needed in the present situation in the intellectual history of Europe, as in the United States, where we live in an increasingly multi-religious society in which other religions no longer appear to Christians as alien phenomena but approach them as realities encountered in everyday life, since they have acquired a tangible personal face through daily

contact with believers of other religions. These nascent multi-religious societies represent both an opportunity and a danger for Jewish-Christian encounters. They are an opportunity in so far as Christians today have an open ear for the world of religions and accordingly display a greater readiness for inter-religious dialogue. The danger however exists in the fact that the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and between synagogue and church today is located within inter-religious dialogue, reducing it to the level of merely another variant of inter-religious conversation, so that its irreducible uniqueness is no longer brought to bear. But the fact that the Jewish-Christian encounter involves a distinctive individual relationship<sup>9</sup> was expressed by Pope John Paul II in the vivid and impressive words: “The Jewish religion is not something ‘extrinsic’ to us but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism we therefore have a relationship we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and in a certain way it could be said, our elder brothers.”<sup>[10]</sup> If we take this self-assessment at its word, it is indispensable to face the theological questions which arise in the forefront of Jewish-Christian dialogue and which must be approached in mutual esteem, especially since very different faith convictions must be addressed there which are in each instance constitutive for the respective faith community.

### **a) The New Testament as fulfilment, not substitution for the Old**

Unity and difference between Judaism and Christianity come to the fore in the first instance with the testimonies of divine revelation. With the existence of the Old Testament as an integral part of the one Christian bible, there is a deeply rooted sense of identity and intrinsic kinship between Judaism and Christianity. The roots of Christianity lie in the Old Testament, and Christianity constantly draws nourishment from this Old Testament root. With the existence of the New Testament, the question naturally arose quite soon of how the two testaments are related to one another, whether for example the New Testament writings have not superseded the older writings and nullified them. This position was represented by Marcion in the second century, namely that the New Testament had made the Old Testament book of promises obsolete, destined to fade away in the glow of the new, just as one no longer needs the light of the moon as soon as the sun has risen. This stark antithesis between the Hebrew and the Christian bible fortunately never became an official doctrine of the Christian church. By excluding Marcion from the Christian congregation in 144, the church rejected his concept of a purely “Christian” bible purged of all Old Testament elements, bore witness to its faith in the one and only God who is the author of both testaments, and thus held fast to the unity of both testaments, the *concordia testamentorum*.

This is of course only one side of the relationship between the two testaments. The common patrimony of the Old Testament however not only formed the fundamental basis of a spiritual kinship between Jews and Christians but also brought with it an elementary tension in the relationship of the two faith communities. This is demonstrated by the fact that Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New, in the conviction expressed by Augustine in the indelible formula: “In the Old Testament the New is concealed and in the New the Old is revealed”.<sup>[11]</sup> Pope Gregory the Great also spoke in the same sense when he defined the Old Testament as “the prophecy of the New” and the latter as the “best commentary of the Old”.<sup>[12]</sup>

This Christological exegesis can easily give rise to the impression that Christians consider the New Testament not only as the fulfilment of the Old but at the same time as a substitution for it. That this impression can only be correct in a limited sense is evident already from the fact that Judaism too found itself compelled to adopt a new reading of the Old Testament after the catastrophe of the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70. Since the Sadducees who were bound to the temple did not survive this catastrophe, the Pharisees developed their particular mode of reading and interpreting the Old Testament in the time without a temple. In his book on Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI rightly concluded from this that there were as a consequence two responses to this situation, or more precisely, two new ways of reading the Old Testament after the year 70,<sup>[13]</sup> namely the Christological exegesis of the Christians and the rabbinical exegesis of that form of

Judaism which arose after the destruction of the temple. Since both modes each involved a new interpretation of the Old Testament, the crucial new question must be precisely how these two modes are related to one another. But since the Christian church and post-biblical rabbinical and Talmudic Judaism, which originated only after the destruction of the temple, developed in parallel, this question cannot be answered from the New Testament alone, and is not to be followed up further here, although the conclusion Pope Benedict XVI drew from it needs to be mentioned. "After centuries of opposing positions we recognise it as our duty that these two ways – Christian and Jewish – of reading the Biblical writings must enter into dialogue with one another in order to rightly understand the will and the word of God."<sup>[14]</sup> Here Pope Benedict has taken up once more a finding that the Pontifical Biblical Commission formulated in its 2001 document "The Jewish people and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible" that Christians can and must admit "that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish scriptures of the Second Temple period, analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion"; it then draws the conclusion: "Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible."<sup>[15]</sup>

### **b) The Old and New Covenants in the one history of God's covenant**

The view of Pope Benedict that the two readings each serve the purpose of "rightly understanding God's will and word" clearly shows the importance he attaches to the issue of the Christian faith being rooted in Judaism before and in the turn of the eras, with its potential for leading Jewish-Christian dialogue into the future.<sup>[16]</sup> On this foundation the insight can develop that from the perspective of the new elements in each of them, Judaism and Christianity respectively exist in a new relationship to one another since the beginning of the new era. That raises the further question of how the Old and the New Covenant stand in relation to one another. For the Christian faith it is axiomatic that there can only be single covenant history of God and humanity. This is already evident in the fact that the history of God with humanity has been realised in a series of covenants, beginning with the covenant with Noah, then with Abraham, with Moses, Joshua, and Esra, with the Prophet Jeremiah even promising a new covenant. Each of these covenants incorporates the previous covenant and interprets it in a new way. That is also true for the new covenant which for us Christians is the final covenant and therefore the definitive interpretation of what was promised by the prophets of the Old Covenant, or as Paul expresses it, the "Yes" and "Amen" to "all that God has promised" (2 Cor 1:20). The New Covenant is therefore neither the annulment nor the replacement of the Old Covenant, as Cardinal Walter Kasper has correctly stressed: "The New Covenant for Christians is not the replacement, but the fulfilment of the Old Covenant. Both stand with each other in a relationship of promise or anticipation and fulfilment."<sup>[17]</sup> If the Christian church is the fulfilment of God's plan in and with Israel, if it consists of Jews and Gentiles and if it would be 'defective' without Jews, then any idea of replacement must be excluded.<sup>[18]</sup>

For Jewish-Christian dialogue in the first instance God's covenant with Abraham proves to be constitutive, as he is not only the father of Israel but also the father of the faith of Christians. In this covenant community it must be evident for Christians that the covenant that God concluded with Israel has never been revoked but remains valid on the basis of God's unflinching faithfulness to his people, and consequently the New Covenant which Christians believe in can only be understood as the surpassing affirmation and fulfilment of the Old. We Christians are therefore also convinced that through the new covenant the Abrahamic covenant has obtained that universality for all peoples which was of course originally intended. This recourse to the Abrahamic covenant is so essentially constitutive of the Christian faith that the Christian church without Israel would be in danger of losing its locus in the history of salvation and degenerating into an ultimately unhistorical gnosis. By the same token, Jews could with regard to the Abrahamic covenant arrive at the insight that Israel without the church would be in danger of remaining too particularist. In this fundamental sense Israel and the church remain bound up with one another according to the covenant and

interdependent on one another.

That there can only be one history of God's covenant with his mankind, and that consequently Israel is God's chosen and beloved people of the covenant which has never been repealed or revoked, is a conviction that lies behind the Apostle Paul's passionate struggle with the dual fact that on the one hand the Old Covenant from God continues to be in force, but that Israel has not adopted the New Covenant. In order to do justice to both facts Paul coined the expressive image of the root of Israel into which the wild branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom 11:16-20).<sup>[19]</sup> This image represents for Paul the key to thinking of the relationship between Israel and the church in the light of faith. "Nothing but a single olive tree. God's whole history with humanity is like an olive tree with sacred roots and branches cut out and grafted in and artificially ennobled in this way. All God's dealings are like his way of dealing with this tree."<sup>[20]</sup> With this image Paul gives expression to a duality with regard to the unity and divergence of Israel and the church. On the one hand the image is to be taken seriously in the sense that the grafted wild branches have not grown out of the root itself and or sprung from it but represent a new reality and a new work of salvation by God, so that the Christian church cannot merely be understood as a branch or a fruit of Israel. On the other hand, the image is also to be taken seriously in the sense that the church is only able to survive when it draws nourishment and strength from the root of Israel, and that the grafted branches would wither or even die if they were cut off from the root of Israel.

### **c) One people of God, not two peoples of God**

Speaking literally rather than metaphorically, this means that Israel and the church are related to and interdependent on one another, precisely because they exist in a state not only of unity but also difference. Israel and the church thus remain bound up with one another to that extent, and indeed both unmixed yet undivided.<sup>[21]</sup> The relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament people of God is also to be regarded in this light. This relationship requires careful attention because even today there is a strong tendency to apply the term "people of God" exclusively to Israel alone or to the church alone.

The second viewpoint has been represented above all by the Protestant systematician Paul Althaus, for whom the historical people of Israel served only for the preparation of the coming of Christ and his church, and must since then be considered a soteriological anachronism: "Israel as the historical people is no longer a theological, 'soteriological' entity because in Christ its soteriological vocation has been fulfilled. Israel has no special place in the church or for the church, nor any special salvific vocation."<sup>[22]</sup> This replacement theory is scarcely represented today, but by contrast the reverse tendency can be observed in Catholic theology of avoiding the term 'people of God' for the Christian church and reserving it for Israel alone. In this sense Herbert Vorgrimler for example states that "there is only one people chosen by God as his possession, that of the Jews, and indeed not only of observant Jews, and the application of the people of God to the church is in any case a metaphor requiring interpretation."<sup>[23]</sup>

As the inserted "not only observant Jews" shows, this reveals a second tendency to comprehend the 'people of God' concept no longer in a strictly theological sense but ethnologically instead, deleting any exclusive connotation, replacing exclusivity with exemplarity and understanding the people of God not as a "monopoly" but rather as a "model", as the Catholic mission theologian Walbert Bühlmann has done in postulating that the biblical understanding on Israel as the chosen people of God means that not only Israel but every people is a chosen people of God<sup>[24]</sup>. A similar tendency can be observed on the Jewish side, wherever the people of God is no longer understood as a theological but rather as an ethnological or even a political entity, and wherever the soteriological view of Judaism is problematised and replaced by a purely secular view. The most radical advance in this direction has been undertaken by the American Jew Richard L. Rubenstein, who dispenses not only with the theology of the covenant but also with the Jewish

conviction in election because this has, in his view, proven to be the real cause for the boundless misery the Jews have experienced in the course of history. For this reason the Jewish people should totally abandon its soteriological view and not wish to be anything more than a people like all other peoples. Jewish existence is not justified by a “special relationship with God” but solely through “Israel’s natural historical existence as a people”, so that the founding of the state of Israel must be understood as the historical ratification of the definitive abandonment of the soteriological view of Israel.<sup>[25]</sup> This represents of course a radical position which can in a sense be understood as the Jewish variant of the “God-is dead”<sup>[26]</sup> theology so influential within Christianity in the 60s, proclaiming the death of God to give expression to the experience of the absence of God in the modern world. This radical view is only mentioned here because it seeks to be understood as the consequence of the experience of the Holocaust.

The trends I have briefly outlined here no doubt have the advantage that they in principle avoid the dilemma caused by the fact that both Israel and the church understand themselves to be the people of God and therefore feel obliged to account for the way they relate to one another. That it is impossible to speak of two peoples of God should have become clear in the preceding discussion, because that would mean giving up the element of unity in the tension between unity and difference in the relationship of Judaism and Christianity. Speaking of the one people of God however proves to be difficult because this single people of God lives in separated communities. It may therefore be most appropriate in regard to Israel and the church to speak of the one people of God’s covenant, which however lives in two parts in a state of division.<sup>[27]</sup>

#### **d) One way of salvation, not different channels to salvation.**

If there cannot be two different people of the covenant but only one, since God has never revoked his covenant with his people Israel, then neither can there be different paths or approaches to God’s salvation. This view has indeed gained increasing plausibility among a broader public in the past years. But it is to be judged as illogical and inconsistent. The assumption that there may be two different paths to salvation, the Jewish path without Christ and the path for all other people which leads through Jesus Christ would not only call into question the groundbreaking discovery of the Second Vatican Council, that Jews and Christians do not belong to two different peoples of God but even in their difference form one people of God; it would in fact also endanger the foundations of Christian faith. Confessing the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith, as does the confession of the one God, the God of Israel, who through his revelation in Jesus Christ has become the God of all peoples, insofar as in him the promise has been fulfilled “that the peoples will pray to the God of Israel as the one God, that ‘the mountain of the Lord’ will be exalted above the other mountains.”<sup>[28]</sup> The “Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church” published by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in 1985 therefore maintained that the church and Judaism cannot be represented as “two parallel ways to salvation”, but that the church must “witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all”.<sup>[29]</sup> The Christian faith stands or falls by the confession that God wants to lead all people to salvation, that he follows this path in Jesus Christ as the universal mediator of salvation, and that there is no “other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:12).

From the Christian confession that there can be only one path to salvation, however, it does not in any way follow that the Jews are excluded from God’s salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. Such a claim would find no support in the soteriological understanding of St Paul, who in the Letter to the Romans not only gives expression to his conviction that there can be no caesura in the history of salvation, but that salvation comes from the Jews, on the basis that in the “time of the Gentiles” God entrusted Israel with an individual mission which Cardinal Ratzinger, taking up the view of the Church Fathers, described in this way: “They (the Jews) must remain as the first proprietors of Holy Scripture with

respect to us, in order to establish a witness to the world” [\[30\]](#) From this it is self-evident that Paul in the Letter to the Romans definitively negates the question he himself has posed, whether God has repudiated his own people. Just as decisively he asserts: “For the grace and call that God grants are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery. It is therefore no accident that Paul’s soteriological reflections in Romans 9-11 on the irrevocable redemption of Israel against the background of the Christ-mystery culminate in a mysterious doxology: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways” (Rom 11:33). It is likewise no accident that Pope Benedict XVI in the second part of his book on Jesus of Nazareth allows Bernard of Clairvaux to say in reference to the problem confronting us, that for the Jews “a determined point in time has been fixed which cannot be anticipated” [\[31\]](#)

The focus of Jewish-Christian conversations must therefore remain the highly complex theological question of how the Christian belief in the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ can coherently be conceptually combined with the equally clear statement of faith in the never-revoked covenant of God with Israel. This complexity is also attested by the re-formulation of the Good Friday Prayer for the Jews in the extraordinary form of the Roman rite which was published in February 2008, and which Pope Benedict XVI had undertaken because the previous formulation “was really offensive to the Jews and failed to positively express the overall intrinsic unity between the Old and New Testaments.” [\[32\]](#) The Pope therefore altered the prayer on the one hand in such a way that “our belief is expressed that Christ is the Saviour for all, that there are not two channels to salvation, that Christ is therefore the Redeemer of the Jews, not just of the Gentiles”. On the other hand however the Pope also altered the prayer in such a way that “it shifts the focus from a direct petition for the conversion of the Jews in the missionary sense to a plea that the Lord may bring about the hour in history when we all may be united” [\[33\]](#)

#### **e) The sensitive issue of so-called mission to the Jews**

Although the new Good Friday prayer in the form of a plea to God confesses the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ within an eschatological horizon (“as the fullness of the peoples enters your church”), it has been vigorously criticised on the part of Jews - and of course also of Christians - and misunderstood as a call to explicit mission to the Jews [\[34\]](#) It is easy to understand that the term so-called ‘mission to the Jews’ is a very delicate and sensitive matter for the Jews because in their eyes it involves the very existence of Israel itself. On the other hand however, this question also proves to be awkward for us Christians too, because for us the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ and consequently the universal mission of the church are of fundamental significance, especially since Paul on his missionary journeys always went first to the Jews in the synagogue, and only turned to the non-Jews after he had encountered resistance from the Jews. If one takes both sides of this delicate question seriously, the Christian church is obligated to perceive its evangelisation task in respect of the Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to the nations. This means, as Cardinal Kasper states, “that the mission command is just as valid for Jews as for the nations, but it must be realised differently for the Jews in respect to the nations” [\[35\]](#)

That the Catholic church respects this fundamental difference is evident above all in the fact that – in contrast to several fundamentalist and evangelical movements – it neither has nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews. In his detailed examination of the question of the so-called mission to the Jews Cardinal Karl Lehmann rightly discerned that on closer investigation one finds “as good as no institutional Jewish mission in Catholic mission history”. “We have an abundant share in other forms of inappropriate attitudes towards the Jews and therefore have no right to elevate ourselves above others. But in respect to a specific and exclusive mission to the Jews there should be no false consternation or unjustified self-accusation in this regard.” [\[36\]](#) The rejection of an institutional mission to the Jews does not on the other hand

exclude Christians from bearing witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews, but should do so in a humble and unassuming manner, particularly in view of the great tragedy of the Shoah.

### 3. The monotheism of Israel and Christian belief in the trinity

When one reviews the fundamental commonalities and the equally elementary differences between Judaism and Christianity, it becomes clear that both faith communities perceive Jesus of Nazareth as a figure thoroughly rooted in the Judaism of his time, but that the Christian confession that the one God of Israel has definitively revealed himself and shown his true face in Jesus of Nazareth stands between them, as the detailed conversation between Pope Benedict XVI and Rabbi Jacob Neusner in the first volume of his book on Jesus vividly demonstrated<sup>[37]</sup>. They are indeed able to reach agreement on the fact that the earthly Jesus claimed divine authority for himself, and in that they contradict prominent trends in historical-critical exegesis which explain the New Testament confession of Christ as a product of the post-Easter community, and thus make Jesus appear simply as a misunderstood Jewish rabbi. If one follows such tendencies to their logical conclusion, the real stumbling block between Christianity and Judaism would be disposed of, and the motivation which makes Jewish-Christian dialogue necessary would also be eliminated. The dialogue between Pope Benedict XVI and Rabbi Neusner vividly draws attention to this predicament.

Moreover, the Christological confession, according to its own logic, has led to the development of the Christian doctrine of the trinity, so that the cited difference has ramifications extending to the respective understandings of God on both sides.<sup>[38]</sup> That is of course in no way intended as a claim that a completely new concept of God entered the world with the advent of Christianity, as was still claimed at the beginning of last century by the church historian Karl Holl with his pointed statement that he was never in any doubt that Jesus had brought a completely new idea of God in respect to the Old Testament.<sup>[39]</sup> In response one must call to mind the result of previous Jewish-Christian conversations that Christianity cannot simply be understood as a new religion in relation to Judaism, with its beginnings merely historically and therefore accidentally in the Jewish people. On the contrary, Jesus' proclamation represents "the true meaning of the Jewish faith in God itself" and Christianity remains "bound to this point of departure".<sup>[40]</sup>

On the other hand, one cannot simply overlook the fact that the Christian doctrine of the trinity signals without a doubt the most prominent difference between Judaism and Christianity and must therefore remain an essential topic of conversation in Jewish-Christian dialogue,<sup>[41]</sup> as Clemens Thoma rightly maintains: "The Christological character of Christian monotheism at the present moment confronts the israelological character of Jewish monotheism".<sup>[42]</sup> For a productive understanding between Jews and Christians it is of crucial significance that on the one side the Christian belief in the Trinity must not be understood as a supplement to the Jewish idea of the one God, much less as its betrayal, but as the critical modification of Jewish monotheism. And on the other side, the Christian belief in the Trinity must be developed against the background of the biblical conviction, fundamental also for the Jewish faith, of God's devotion to the world, initiated already in the creation and continued through salvation history, so that God lives in a relational unity with his people, revealing himself as condescending and appearing as a "you-related God", as Clemens Thoma has once more rightly emphasised: "He not only possesses his You within himself but seeks it also in the earthly realm among the humble and the persecuted. His seeking signifies a process of redemption for the sought".<sup>[43]</sup>

If Christian theology succeeds in credibly demonstrating that the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is to be understood as the culmination point and fulfilment of the self-revealing God of Holy Scripture who turns towards the world, condescends into history and engages in it, Jews for their part could perceive God's self-exposition in bestowing the Torah and in sending the Shechina to the people of Israel as anticipations of what the Christian faith was to develop in the



doctrine of the Trinity. In the light of this, Jews and Christians could at least live in mutual respect for one another, or more precisely in respect for the fact that on the one hand Jews, on the basis of their own faith convictions, cannot possibly read the Old Testament other than in the expectation of the unknown one who is to come; and that on the other hand Christians, on the foundation of the common Abrahamitic faith, live and testify their faith conviction that the one whose coming is awaited by the Jews will be identical with the Christ whom they believe as the one who has already come.

#### **4. The Jewish-Christian pilgrim fellowship in reconciliation and hope**

In this mutual respect Jews and Christians can each fulfil a reciprocal service toward the respective faiths of the other. Where it remains true to its divine calling, Judaism is and remains a thorn in the flesh of Christians, in that it calls Christians to remember the experience of unredeemedness of the world, as Franz Rosenzweig has expressly emphasised: “This existence of the Jew constantly subjects Christianity to the idea that it is not attaining the goal, the truth, that it ever remains — on the way”.<sup>[44]</sup> On the other hand, where the Christian church remains true to its divine mission, it is and remains a thorn in the flesh of Judaism, in that it bears witness to the already bestowed reconciliation of God with mankind, without which there can be no well-founded hope for redemption. In this reciprocal service to the faith of the other Judaism and Christianity, synagogue and church remain inseparably bound to one another, as the Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann expressed it in an abiding directive for Jewish-Christian conversation: “For the sake of the Jew Jesus there is no final separation of church and Israel. For the sake of the gospel there is for the present also no fusion into the eschatological future. But there is the pilgrim fellowship of the hopeful”.<sup>[45]</sup>

Beyond division and fusion, Jews and Christians follow their own path through history. This path can only be a path of reconciliation, which since Auschwitz has appeared before us in its full irrefutability. Because the cross of Jesus Christ has again and again in the course of Christian history been misused as an anti-sign of hostility and hatred towards the Jews by condemning them as deicides, Christians today have every reason and a strict obligation to proclaim and testify also to the Jews the cross of Jesus as a sacrament of reconciliation. Joseph Ratzinger did so when he confessed in a quite personal manner that it was for him already as a child incomprehensible that one could derive a condemnation of the Jews from the death of Jesus, but that the word ‘cross’ had penetrated into his soul as a profound consolation, because the cross of Jesus did not call for punishment but for reconciliation: “The blood of Jesus does not raise any demand for vengeance but calls all to reconciliation; it has itself, as the Letter to the Hebrews shows, become God’s abiding day of reconciliation”.<sup>[46]</sup> When Pope Benedict XVI in the second part of his book on Jesus denies the reproach of a collective guilt of the Jews for the death of Jesus, we may discern in that the consequence of his previous insights into relations between Jews and Christians.

The cross of Jesus must therefore not continue to stand between Christians and Jews. It is rather the Christian invitation to reconciliation and a reminder of the common duty of Jews and Christians to accept one another in a profound internal reconciliation from the depths of faith itself, in order to become a sign and an instrument of reconciliation for the world. What Pope Benedict XVI expressed at his first official encounter with high-ranking representatives of Jewish organisations in June 2005 may therefore stand as a pointer for future dialogue between Jews and Christians: “The history of relations between our two communities was complex and not infrequently painful, nevertheless I am convinced that the spiritual patrimony preserved by Christians and Jews is the source of wisdom and inspiration which can lead us into a future of hope corresponding to God’s plan (cf. Jer 29:11).”<sup>[47]</sup> That even after a “complex and not infrequently painful” history reconciliation can be and indeed is possible, that is attested by the Jewish-Christian dialogue over the past decades, and this is a sign of hope for continuing the pilgrim fellowship of reconciliation in faith in the shechina of God in the Torah and in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

On July 1, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI appointed the then Bishop of Basel, Switzerland, Kurt Koch, to be the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, succeeding the retiring Cardinal Walter Kasper. In this capacity, he also is President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. On November 20, 2010, he was elevated to the College of Cardinals. He has served as President of the Swiss Episcopal Conference and is a member of the Swiss Council of Religions.