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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR THE CHURCH'S RELATION TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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The title which I have given this address may suggest to you that I wish to speak about a special sort of education to deal with a particular detail of the work of the church. Nothing could be further from my intentions. On the contrary, I want to address the issue of theological education as it relates to the very heart of the church's existence. My argument will be that, because the church's relation to the Jewish people defines our existence before God and the core of the church's understanding of God, so its theological education can only properly grow out of, be based upon, and further that relationship.

There is only one issue for theological education, and that is whether it will be education in theology, whether it genuinely serves the church in its impossible task of speaking to God. The issue for theology, and so for theological education, is whether we can learn what the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has done in Jesus Christ, and what he is doing in our own time. It is as true today as it ever was, that unless we can learn what God is doing in our own time, we shall never comprehend what he did of old. That is because the only God which the church knows and has ever known is the living God, the one to whom it made sense for us to pray this morning, and the one to whom it will make sense to pray tonight.

It is possibly truer today than it has been for centuries, that to know God begins with knowing what he is doing in our own time. And see what he has been doing! He has turned the linguistic community that speaks of him in Jesus Christ 180 degrees around, right at its stuffiest, most bureaucratic center. He has not called forth prophets. No, he has made use of popes, cardinals, bishops, presidents and members of church synods, and all sorts of such ecclesiastical stuffed shirts, and he has led them to reverse what the church had been saying about him for eighteen centuries. Contradicting ancient church teaching, that God had cast off his people Israel and displaced them in his favor with a new Israel, the church, since Vatican II has proclaimed that the covenant between God and the Jewish people is eternal. This amazing reversal has been made by Protestants and Catholics, and on both sides of the Atlantic. When one considers the staggering implications of this about-face, it is hard to think of a more fundamental change that has overtaken the church since the first century.

It is essential to notice, however, that what the living God has been doing with his church these days is based on what he has been doing with his people Israel. That shouldn't surprise us. It is how the living God has always worked. The author of Psalm 126 sang words that we can hear as if they had been written in our own time, by an Israeli writer, of course:

> "When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
> we were like men dreaming.
> Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
> and our tongue with rejoicing.
> Then they said among the goyim,
> 'The LORD had done great things for them.'"

Recently, I returned from Jerusalem, where I had been working with a group of young Israeli scholars, talmidim grounded in Judaism's central halakhic tradition, and at the same time completely open to all the challenges of modern thought. For four weeks we wrestled with the unsettling implications for both Judaism and Christianity of the Jewish return to history, the fact of the Jewish State. A mighty reversal has come about in the long history of Israel. Twenty centuries of living under the dominion of foreigners have come to an end, and, once more, the Jewish people have taken on the responsibility of living their eternal covenant with all the social, political and military consequences of being a people in control of the land of promise. I can assure you that there are Jewish theologians struggling with the question of what God is up to in our time. And since the goyim, or at least the Gentile church, has seen and said that the ancient love affair between God the people Israel is still on, Christian theological education has an exciting agenda before it. We can ignore it if we choose, but to do so is to give up speaking of the living God. We live in a time in which something crucial is going on between God and his people Israel. Since the church is bound to that same God by our Lord Jesus Christ, we should not be surprised that we, too, are being shaken into a new understanding of God's and our own relationship to the Jewish people.

If we mean it when we acknowledge that the covenant between God and the Jewish people endures, then we cannot simply add that on to our theology, and we cannot simply add a course in Judaica to our seminary curriculum. The issue is not at all the one that comes to mind with the expression "Jewish-Christian Relations." I am not talking about Jewish-Christian dialogue. Being nice to Jews is not the point. The issue is theological. It concerns the relationship between the Israel of God and the church of God, a relationship that is grounded in the fact that the church is nothing other than the community of Gentiles who have been called by and who worship the God of Israel. That is the self-definition to which we

are forced, once we have affirmed the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

The implications of this 180 degree reversal touches every aspect of our theology and it has implications for every branch of theological education. Church history, for example, cannot in truth explore the history of God with the community of faith it it ignores the parallel history of God with the community of his own Israel after the flesh, the history of the real Israel. If church history is to be the history of the Church of the God of Israel, then it should take off the blinders, which it certainly wore when I was a seminary student, and consider the fact that classical Judaism was taking shape during exactly the same centuries in which classical Christianity was being developed. It should make the church aware that the crusaders started killing Jews by the hundreds in Europe before they ever set off for Palestine. It should remind us of the debt of Medieval theology to Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers. And I trust your church history has instructed you that, in fourteen hundred and ninety-two, the really important event was not that Columbus sailed the ocean blue, but that the King of Spain expelled the Jew, every man, woman and child, many to die a horrible death. Church history, if it digests the history of the Jewish people, will undercut every pretention of the church to be the reign of God on earth, for it will show that the church has, for almost all of its life, been fighting against the Israel of God and therefore against God's own covenant with his people.

Are the implications any less unsettling for the discipline of the study of what we have called "the Old Testament"? We owe this collection of Israel's sacred scriptures to the Sages and Pharisees who, in carrying out the great reform of Ezra, edited and preserved them for the future. Professor Brevard Childs of Yale University has taken a giant step ahead of the pack in asking us to look at the Scriptures from the point of view of the final form given to them by those who fixed the Canon. But it is, in truth, only a baby step. For Childs has not asked us to consider those who fixed the Canon, the Tannaim of rabbinic Judaism, nor the flowering mishnaic Judaism that developed the oral Torah, on the wise understanding that a covenant given in time must also develop in time if it is to be an incarnate expression of the will of a living God for his living people. How different would be our reading of Torah, the Prophets and the Writings of Israel, if we learned to read them as Israel's Scriptures first, and then as belonging to us because they belong first of all to them. When we take them first of all as the church's Canon, we distort them because we have to: we spiritualize them because we try to apply them directly to us. But they weren't written for a Gentile church. They were and are written for Israel, the Jewish people. They address them in all their concreteness, with a concrete promise of an actual land and the commandment to maintain the covenant by continuing to

make Jewish babies. Only when we hear them addressed to the Jews, may we overhear them in their glorious address also to us Gentiles.

The sacred Scriptures of Israel were the only Scriptures of Jesus and his apostles. The church had to decide about the Canon of the so-called New Testament, the Apostolic Writings. It never had to decide about the Scriptures of Israel, for they were the foundation upon which Christ and his apostles stood. Yet to this day they are read in our services as if they were only an introduction to the readings from the Apostles, as if the story begun therein had no other future than that of the Gentile church, as if God had not produced the incredible blossoming of rabbinic Judaism during just those centuries in which he built up catholic Christianity. Where would we be today had Marcion not been condemned? But we may well ask where we might be tomorrow if we were to reject Marcion in principle, not merely in name, and claim the sacred Scriptures of Israel as truly Israel's Scriptures first, and therefore, also ours.

To confess the continuing reality of the covenant between God and the Jewish people has serious implication also for our theological education in the interpretation of the writings of the apostles and the apostolic communities, the collection of documents usually known as the New Testament. A whole new picture of this material is beginning to open up in the work of scholars who have taken the trouble to learn about the Jewish world of the first century from the Jewish sources, and the result is to call into question the presuppositions which have controled traditional interpretations. I have in mind the work of such New Testament scholars as Krister Stendahl, Douglas Hare, Malcolm Lowe, Gerard Sloyan, Peter von den Osten-Sacken, and especially Lloyd Gaston. Once the teaching of first century Judaism is understood, Jesus is seen to fit into his context and to sound remarkably at home within the general framework of Pharisaism. The anti-Pharisaic polemics of parts of the Gospels begins to make sense in the context of the conflict of the church and the synagogue towards the latter part of the first century, and Jesus comes into focus as a Jew arguing with fellow Jews about the real meaning of being Israel.

I am not denying that there are clearly anti-Judaic passages in the Apostolic Writings. I would maintain, however, that their generally anti-Judaic effect, so marked a feature of their Wirkungsgeschichte, is due far more to the presuppositions which have determined their interpretations than it does to the texts themselves. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of the Apostle to the Gentiles, on whom I would like to dwell for a moment.

Who was the apostle Paul and what was his message? This question stands in the center of the debate in the church today between those who have seen the reality of the Jewish

people as God's Israel, who have affirmed the continuing vitality of the covenant of Sinai, and those who still follow the anti-Judaic tradition which prevailed unchallenged from the second until the middle of the twentieth century. The question about Paul raises the issue whether you and I and the church in general are still able to be educated theologically.

According to the traditional reading, already clear in Justin Martyr and still alive in Bultman's students, such as Ernst Kasemann, Paul, crushed by his inability to fulfill the Law, converted from being a Jew to being a Christian and switched his allegiance from the Jewish people to the new Israel, the church. He taught that Judaism was a false religion, because it claimed that human beings could establish their standings before God by obeying the commandments of the Law, a task which Paul knew to be an impossibility. In order to save humanity from this accursed situation, Christ had come to put an end to the Law, and through him God now offered a relationship with himself on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. The Jews boasted of circumcision and their works of the Law as their claim upon God's love, and rejected the Gospel of faith in Jesus. Therefore God had rejected them, until the day when they would accept the Gospel and be saved by becoming Christians. Paul, as the champion of justification by faith alone, was therefore the church's mighty warrior against the Jews, Jewish legalism and the Law.

Now, that traditional reading is not as pure exegesis as its defenders pretend. Indeed, its conclusion - about Paul as the enemy of the Jews, Judaism and the Law - looks suspiciously like the presupposition on which the whole depends, a presupposition that leaves a number of serious questions unanswered. For example, why is it that Paul never spoke of what had happened to him as a conversion? Why did he speak instead as if he had received a prophetic calling, like that of Jeremiah, or even more like that of the servant of Isaiah 49? More telling, how could it be that Paul, who claimed to be a Pharisee and an advanced student of not only the written Torah, but also of the Oral Torah, "the traditions of my fathers," as he called it, how could it be that such a one should have so totally misunderstood the teachings of Judaism? For if you know anything about first century Judaism, you will know that obedience to the commandments was understood by Jews to be Israel's grateful response to God's love for them. The religious pattern of Judaism, to use E. P. Sander's terms, was and is covenantal nomism: you get into the covenant by God's merciful love, by sheer grace, and you live that covenant by following the life of the Torah. As Lloyd Gaston has asked, shouldn't we assume that Paul knew as much about covenantal nomism as E. P. Sanders?

If the traditional reading of Paul is correct, why did he insist that the Torah was good and holy, and how could he

have asserted that he was upholding Torah? If he was so ridden by a guilty conscience over his inability to keep the commandments, why did he say so calmly that as a Torah-faithful Jew he had been blameless? If he was fighting Jews and Judaism, why did he insist so vehemently, a full twenty-five years after Easter, that God had not rejected his people? And why did he say, if his opponents were Jews, as the traditional reading would have it, that they desired to become circumcised? Finally, we would simply note that Paul never called the church the "new Israel." Indeed, that phrase appears nowhere in the New Testament. It is the invention of the extra-biblical presupposition that created the traditional Paul.

That Paul is patently absurd. If your theological education is doing anything for you, it will lead you to see that the presuppositions which produce such a reading must be wrong. It should also lead you to look for others. Let me suggest a few.

1. Paul was not only a Jew: when pressed he boasted of it. He called himself a Pharisee and boasted that he had been zealous for the traditions of his fathers. I suggest we begin by taking Paul at his word and ssume that he knew as much or more about first century Judaism as you or I are ever likely to learn.

2. Paul claimed to have been commissioned by God to go to the Gentiles. He even cut a deal with the Jerusalem church: Peter would talk to the Jews, and he would go to the Gentiles. Not a word of Paul's letters suggests that he went back on that deal, no matter what the Acts of the Apostles says. I suggest that we whould always assume, lacking compelling evidence to the contrary, that Paul had Gentiles in mind as he wrote his letters. What he would have written to his fellow Jews is a fascinating question, but our answers can only be conjecture.

3. The Acts of the Apostles (21:21) tells us that Paul was accused of teaching "all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs." Aside from the fact that Paul gives us no grounds to think that he tried to teach the Jews anything, there is not one word in any of his own letters to support this charge. I suggest that we assume it to have been a radical misunderstanding of Paul, that he had nothing but the highest respect for Moses, circumcision and the customs or oral Torah of his people, and that we try to read him as standing within rather than as against his own tradition, unless we have compelling reasons to do otherwise.

If we bring these presuppositions to our reading, I suggest that a quite different Paul emerges, and one who makes complete sense in his context. He was a Jew, so his

starting place was Abraham, and the central reality for him, prior to his call to preach Christ to the Gentiles, was God's Torah-covenant with Israel. That calling clearly revoluntionized Paul. He understood himself to have been caught up in a new movement of God's in which now, apart from Torah (that is, alongside of, rather than within the framework of Torah), God's righteousness (God's effective making-things-right) had appeared in Jesus Christ in order to fulfill what God had promised to Abraham, that he would become the father, not only of Israel, but also of many goyim.

I should like to propose to you a reading of Paul's message as he presented it in his letter to the church in Rome, based on these presuppositions. One other presupposition should be mentioned before I begin that. There is an early rabbinic midrash that God offered the Torah to all the nations of the world before he offered it to Israel. They all refused it, and as a result, they were all without excuse. They knew the Torah, but they did not even try to live by it. The consequence was that the Torah was a curse over their heads, condemning them. It sounds to some of us as if Paul knew this tradition. His whole concern was that with the Gentiles, and for the Gentiles, the Torah was bad news. Only within the covenant and therefore only for Israel was the Torah a glorious gift of God's love. I suggest you consider every reference to the curse of Torah and its dire consequences as directed to those for whom Paul believed he was called to be an apostle - namely to the Gentiles. The merit of the suggestion is that Paul thereby ceases to be utterly illogical and self-contradictory in what he has to say about the Torah, which is how he comes out in the traditional reading. And now let us try a reconstruction of Paul's Gospel.

Paul had been appointed, he told his readers, to make known the good news of a new manifestation of the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:1, 17). Although the manifestation was new, it had been pointed to already in the Torah and the prophets (3:21, 1:2). Now, "in the present time", that righteousness which Abraham had faithfully ascribed to God was being carried out: God was laying claim to the many nations, calling them to Abrahamic sonship "out of the faithfulness of Jesus" (3:26). The news of this happening, therefore, completely confirmed Torah (3:31), for God's righteousness had been counted to - that is, stored up in God on behalf of - Abraham while the patriarch was still a Gentile, before he received circumcision (4:9-11a), precisely so that he might become the father not only of his faithful descendants, Israel, but also of believing Gentiles (4:11b-12). Gentile sinners in their helpless condition had been reconciled to God by the death of God's son, Jesus Christ and were now caught up in the love of God (5:6-11). What Torah could not do for Gentiles - namely, lead those who had rejected god's Torah

into the path of righteousness - God had now accomplished through Christ, so that that righteousness of God which Torah expressed for Israel might take place also in them (8:3-4). This was truly startling news of a new thing, news for Israel as well as for the Gentiles.

Paul was in agony over the fact that most of his fellow Jews had no ears for this news and no eyes to see this new righteousness of God (Rom. 9:1ff, 11:8-10). Sons of Abraham, living within the covenant, and therefore knowing the promise that just this would happen (9:4), they of all people should have been the ones to know that God's election, both of Israel and now of the Gentiles too, was totally a matter of God's free love (9:6-29). But in point of fact, what was happening was that the Gentiles, who had not the vaguest idea of God's righteousness, were now being caught up in it (9:30), whereas Israel was so eagerly centered on the Torah of righteousness - for Torah is unquestionably God's righteousness for Israel - that they did not anticipate (although it was right there in Torah! 9:31) this new manifestation of the righteousness of God on behalf of Abraham's Gentile heirs. They never dreamed that God's righteousness, which they so eagerly followed according to Torah, could also be, for the Gentiles, accomplished through the faithfulness to Christ, rather than by their becoming proselytes (9:32). The very idea of God's righteousness being enacted apart from fidelity to Torah was just too new for them (cf. 3:21, 9:33). Consequently, they could not see that Christ, as God's means of reconciling the Gentiles to himself, was for them the goal for which the Torah of the covenant existed (10:4). In short, God had made Christ to be that righteousness of God stored up for Abraham. In doing this, God had thereby opened the way for Abraham to become the father not only of Isaac, but also of many nations.

Paul's deepest hope and prayer was, therefore, that his fellow Jews would be saved from their blindness (10:1). Their rejection of Paul's news about the righteousness of God did, indeed, make room for Paul's mission to the Gentiles (11:11, 15) and was therefore to the benefit of the latter (11:12a, 28a), but Paul longed for Israel's cooperation in this mission (11:12b, 31b). He was absolutely convinced that God had not rejected his beloved people Israel (11:1,2, 11, 28, 29). How could he? They were, after all, Abraham's heirs and so heirs of the promises. (11:1, 28b).

So may Paul be read, if, contrary to the whole history of Christian exegesis, we take him at his word that he was and Israelite, a Pharisee, and blameless in his keeping of Torah - at least until his calling seemed to demand an identification with his new Gentile converts. But from our earliest records, Paul was not so read by Gentiles unfamiliar

with his Pharisaic background. Instead, his glorious good news addressed to Gentiles of the righteousness of the God of Abraham being now extended to them, was twisted into a venomous attack upon Paul's beloved fellow Jews and upon his and their hallowed and joyful Torah. The result was that the church set up an almost insuperable barrier to the fulfillment of Paul's deepest hopes and prayers. In the face of the church's anti-Judaism, how could Israel say "Amen" to this new manifestation of the righteousness of the God of Abraham? Jesus Christ as the confirmation of the promises of God to Abraham has, therefore, not appeared within the testimony of Israel to God's particular way for achieving the completion of his creation. Whether Paul's prayer will yet be answered and Israel's witness include, also, this act of God's election remains to be seen. This would clearly depend upon how the church will decide to read the words of the God of Abraham's apostle to the Gentiles.

I could happily work through other parts of Paul's letters, especially Galatians, but perhaps this is enough to indicate that theological education has its task cut out for it to reconsider why it has read Paul as it has, and how he might be otherwise understood if we take seriously what the leaders of the churches have said about the continuing covenant between God and the Jewish people. My exploration of Paul's Gospel - and he insisted there was no other - is intended to get you to see how decisive are the presuppositions which you bring to your theological studies. An essential element of a proper theological education will therefore be the most careful, critical examination of those presuppositional choices as you can possibly manage.

This leads me then to my own field of systematic or dogmatic theology. Ten years after the promulgation of Nostra Aetate, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement in which they said: "We find in the Epistle to the Romans (9-11) long neglected passages which help us to construct a new and positive attitude toward the Jewish people. There is here a task incumbent on theologians as yet hardly begun to explore the continuing relationship of the Jewish people with God and their spiritual bond with the New Covenant and the fulfillment of God's plan for both Church and Synagogue." That was seven and a half years ago, and precious little has been done. If it is "incumbent on theologians to explore the continuing relationship between the Jewish people of God," then it is surely incumbent on those engaged in theological education, whether as professors or students, to heed this charge and get to work. The whole theological enterprise is at stake.

The realization that has come over the church in recent years that the Israel of God is alive and next door to us, that God's people has come back onto the stage of history in

eretz Yisrael challenges the church to do some hard and truly fresh thinking. This has little to do with Jewish-Christian dialogue, as far as its content goes, and it has little to do with so-called Holocaust Theology, whatever that is supposed to be. It has rather to do with our own theology as the church of Jesus Christ. It has to do directly and radically with ecclesiology, with our understanding of God (theology in the strict sense), and with our Christology, our understanding of Jesus Christ. Nor is the issue with which we are confronted that of pluralism, of seeing ourselves as one of a number of alternative religious options. All that is child's play in comparison with the challenge which our reawakening to the reality of living Israel poses for us. I want to alert you to this challenge by suggesting four stipulations which any serious theology, yours, mine, the church's, must meet in order to begin to do justice to the Jewish-Christian reality. I shall then discuss three major issues which have forced themselves on my attention in wrestling with the brightest and most hard-headed Jewish theologians. As you well see, I do not think that any of our theological options of the past will serve us unaltered, but I also think that almost any of them can serve us if they are sufficiently altered. So, I shall not try to convert you to existentialist, or dialectic, or process, or liberation theology. Start from where you are, but consider the following stipulations.

1. Any theology that can serve us today and tomorrow will have to be self-consciously church theology. That is because the rediscovery of the Israel of God poses for the church the ultimate identity crisis. If Israel is there before us, if the old Israel is the ever new Israel, if Israel after the flesh is the only Israel there is, then who in God's world are we? If the covenant of Sinai is still in force, if Israel to this day is still serving God in prayer and observing his commandments, as his elect light for the Gentiles, then what is the church? A theology of the Jewish-Christian reality has to face this question. It will have to help the church understand itself in honest and open awareness of the reality of Israel. Until a better ecclesiology is developed, I suggest that the church will have to see itself as the community of Gentiles who have been gathered by the Holy Spirit of the God of Israel to worship and serve him in Jesus Christ. And since, to quote the God of Israel's Apostle to the Gentiles, "Christ became a servant to the Jewish people" (Rom. 15:8), so as his younger brothers and sisters, the church will have to see that its service to God must include a service to the Jewish people. A theology for the time in which God has placed us right now cannot afford the luxury of addressing itself to the cultured among its despisers. It must serve a church that has been confronted

by the most serious identity crisis of its history.

2. A theology for such a church in such a time - and when has there been any other church or any other time, had it not taken us so long to see it? - will be, secondly, trinitarian. This follows from the way in which the Gentile church knows the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The doctrine of the Trinity of God is the quintessentially Christian doctrine, because it corresponds precisely to God's dealings with the church. He, the one, unique God of Israel, has as Creator Spiritus called his Gentile church into life out of the death of paganism and bound it to himself in Jesus Christ. The church knows no other God and it knows this God in no other way. It can, therefore, only confess the one God as Father, Son, Spirit. Any theology for a church aware of its own identity as distinct from Israel, yet in the service of the God of Israel, will see that the doctrine of the Trinity is absolutely fundamental. To place it in an appendix, as Schleiermacher and Tillich did, is to ignore the church's own Gentile experience of the God of Israel.

3. Third, a theology helpful and reliable for the today and tomorrow of a church that lives cooperatively with the Israel of God will be Christological, and its Christology will be "from above," to use the neologism of some contemporary theologians who have yet to ponder sufficiently the implications of Nostra Aetate. It will be Christological because apart from Christ, the church would never have come into being and there could not have been such a thing as Christian theology at all. Further, it will be a "Christology from above," because Jesus of Nazareth is either first and foremost the act of the living God to reconcile us Gentiles to himself, or else he is just another figure in the history of late Second Temple Judaism. Of course, the wretched as well as glorious humanity of that first century Jew is essential to who he was and is, just as the wretched as well as glorious concrete reality of the Jewish people is essential to who they are. The God we speak of is one who has chosen to work only in and through the lives and actions of his creatures. His revelation and his purpose are given over fully into the hands of men and women. But just as the Jewish people are vital for the church only because they are God's elect, so Jesus of Nazareth was and is who he is for the church only because he was and is God's Incarnate Way for them to draw near to the God of Israel. Take away God's election, or even set it to one side for the moment while we start "from below," and what do we have? The Jews then turn out to be the bearers - or more realistically, the largely secularized descendants of the bearers - of one of the religions of mankind. In which case, they turn out to be as interesting for the church as, but no more interesting than, the bearers of other religions of mankind. We can find among the ancient Jews our historical roots, and you can make a pilgrimage to the "Holy Land" and see where all that happened back then, but as for contemporary Jews, all we would owe to

them would be the same tolerance that we owe to others. And as for Israel, the Jewish State, it becomes but one among others. Likewise, Jesus turns out to be a rather unlikely figure to get all that excited about, and one utterly foreign to our own time and experience. Surely he was far too Jewish to be an ideal for modern Gentiles.

No, the church in its identity crisis needs more solid meat than that. The Jewish people are what they are for us because of what they are before God, and Jesus of Nazareth is what he is for us because of what he is before God. A theology for the Jewish-Christian relationship that God has established between us will have to begin with that establishment by God. It will have to begin with Israel's election, and it will have to begin its Christology with the decision of the God of Israel to reconcile us Gentiles to himself.

4. Fourth, a theology adequate for the Jewish-Christian reality in which we now live will be oriented to and open the church up to history. It will be always practical theology and ethics, theory and practice, not because it springs from having read a little bit of Karl Marx, but because it knows of no other God than the Creator of just this concrete world, who has promised that he will be the Redeemer of just this world which he has created. Moreover, this is the God who gave his Torah into the hands of his people Israel and told them to make up their own minds about what it meant. This is a God who made a covenant with Israel, a contract that has two sides, and a God who has committed himself to a future that depends on Israel, not just on himself. A theology that does justice to the Jewish as well as the Christian reality, to the living Israel that the church has come to recognize, as well as the church that has come to this recognition, will call the church back into history as Israel has been called back into history.

I would like to turn now from these general requirements for any systematic theology that will be adequate for the new situation of the church, face to face with the Israel of God. As you can see, they are not all that new. That is because the situation of the church is new only in that we have recently become aware of what was true all along. Israel has always been there, after all, and it is Israel, not the events of this century, that is the great fact of God which the church of God needs to ponder and to which it should respond. Measured by these stipulations, our theology has been inadequate all along. What is new is that our blinders have been torn away to reveal to us again, in our day, that the covenant between God and Israel is alive, and, therefore, so is the people Israel.

This brings me, finally, to three issues which I have

had to confront in doing theology together with halakhically oriented and trained Jewish talmidim. They are questions which serious Jewish theologians have asked, critically but sympathetically, about Christian theology today. They are questions which I commend to your most careful attention in your theological education. Let me list them, and then discuss them in order.

1. Can there be a theology of the living God that rules out guarantees and leaves history open-ended?

2. Can there be a concept of revelation that acknowledges the human component as essential?

3. Can there be a Christology that does justice to the church's experience, yet which makes room for that of others?

I believe it is possible and desirable to given an affirmative answer to each of these questions, but such an answer does not come without work. Let us begin with the first question which is perhaps the most fundamental. Can there be - not would you like to have, but - is it logically or theologically possible to believe in and speak of a living God, and also say that history is open ended? Or are we committed in the church to saying that finally God will triumph, no matter what human beings, not to speak of Satan, may do. "He will come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end," we rehearse in the words of the Nicene Creed, and, "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." In which case, history is not open-ended. It could not possibly end in failure. We sound as if we believed that to be guaranteed. Doesn't that follow from the fact that God is a living God, the Lord of history?

Let me break into these difficult questions and analyze our problem. First of all, what are we doing when we speak of the living God? Aren't we in enough trouble already just trying to speak of God at all? The word looks like a proper name, but we are not able to specify any referent, either ostensively or by a unique description, one that is not circular. God refers to what is beyond reference. God is, in the last analysis, ineffable. Both the Jewish and the Christian traditions, at their most sophisticated, know this well enough, but not many of our contemporaries do, and the believers are as bad on this as the unbelievers.

The truth of the matter is that we have God only and always by way of our respective linguistic communities. We learned to pray to God, and then to speak of God, from our communities, Jews from the community of Torah, Christians from the community of Christ, both of which, Torah and Christ, we learned to know as min hashamayim, from God, if I may so translate. (May I just say in passing, that any student today who

thinks she or he is getting a theological education without learning Hebrew, not to speak of Greek, is simply deceiving him or herself. To think that you can deal with problems of this depth without learning the language, leaving you unable to see the ghastly horrors of the various modern translations, and even the extent to which biblical dictionaries have been determined by unexamined and undefended presuppositions, is simply to walk into a boxing ring with your hands tied behind your back. I urge those of you who are theological students, if you care at all to serve God in his church, stop right now in your studies and learn the languages sufficiently well to distinguish between the shepherds and the wolves among those who have gone before us.)

To return to the problem, it does not greatly disturb me that I am unable to provide a clear answer to what I mean by speaking of God. It is sufficient for me that I speak of God as an inevitable consequence of having identified myself with a community that speaks of him. When I speak of God, I do what my linguistic community does: I orient myself to what I take to be reality.

When I and my community speak not only of God, but speak of the living God, we and I refer to the central character of a story in which we have come to see ourselves and our world. To be a Christian and to be a ew is to risk to locate yourself within a narrative and to identify yourself with a narrative-bearing community, a community that speaks of this Other, God, in a distinctly personal way. Of course, it is mythological, but I know of no alternative to mythology.

So now, what about the future? What of the future of God's creation, of the covenant, of Israel and of the church? The story which Israel tells, and the story which the church tells, have often been interpreted as being oriented to the future. The experience of the church to date, however, and even more, the experience of the Jewish people, suggest that messianism and apocalypticism are not the healthiest expressions of our respective traditions. Messianism and apocalypticism seem to know too much about the future and not enough about the present. They ignore the judgment of a certain Pharisee that love is more important than hope, for hope is in the unseen, whereas love directs us quite concretely to the visible neighbor.

When we say that we believe that Christ will come in glory to be our judge, do we really know that that glory will look more like the Transfiguration than the Cross? And when we say that we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, is that a look that takes our eye away from the present world? It has certainly done so during much of the church's history, but does it have to? I think we have to admit that much Christian talk has sounded as if the future were guaranteed in such a way as to lessen our sense of responsibility for the present. The more I listen to the

witness of living Israel, however, the more I am convinced that we ought not and need not talk that way. The Jewish witness challenges us to reexamine our hope in the living God and to shape it in such a way that hope is always a support to works of love.

The witness of Jewish fidelity to Torah is to a covenant in which it really matters what God's human partners do. Israel testifies by its life and history, by its behavior as well as in words, that God has given into human hands an immeasureable responsibility for the future of his creation. In the world in which we live today, that is testimony we had better hear. To block our ears with Augustinian worries about synergism may lead to disaster. It would be better if we explored more responsibly than we have thus far the insight of that Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that God is calling us to live and act before his living presence as if he were not, as if the whole responsibility for the future depended on us. Then, I believe, we could learn to speak of and trust in a living God before whom the future is truly open ended.

The second question which Israel's witness has sharpened for me is this: can there be a concept of revelation which acknowledges its human component as essential? My old teacher Karl Barth would have answered, how can there possibly be a concept of revelation that does not acknowledge its human component? Well, as a matter of fact, there is such a concept of revelation: the Cartesian one, which controlled the theology of Protestant Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century and is still alive in the writings of some conservative Evangelicals today. It is based on that ingenious invention of the Cartesian ego: the clear and distinct idea, which alone can be true because it is clear and distinct. Its manifestation in theology is the conception of revelation as pure proposition. It is the child of the Age of Absolute Man with his absolute human reason. It rings forth with all the assurance of Louis XIV: "L'etat, c'est moi!" The Cartesian concept of revelation cannot admit the human factor, although it has built it in unnoticed in its concept of Absolute Reason. Its propositions are claimed by their defenders to be purely divine. Their weakness is that they are so evidently human.

"Torah speaks in the language of human beings." I'm fairly sure that Karl Barth did not know that rabbinic saying, but he would have loved it. There is no divine Torah other than the Torah of Moses. The Word of God can only be heard in the words of human beings. If God can really address human beings, then he must address them as human beings and therefore in the way in which human beings can be addressed, in human words. And as the author of the Fourth Gospel realized, if the Word of God became flesh, then there is no way to that Word except by coming to terms with that flesh - gnawing,

or munching noisily, is the sense of the verb he used. I am no more led by this to a doctrine of "revelation from below" than I am to a doctrine of "Christology from below." A Torah of J,E,P, and D is only interesting if we are first of all convinced that we are dealing with God's instruction for his people. Judaism as a civilization is as interesting as, but no more interesting than, Christianity as a civilization. Neither, I suggest, is particularly attractive.

But the Jewish reality has another point to make here that we in the church need to consider. The Torah that really matters in the history of the Jewish people is not the first five books of Moses. The Torah that really counts is the so-called Oral Torah, the developed and developing halakhic tradition, still growing to this day. And as David Hartman has put it, "When we Jews speak of our great teacher Moses, we mean Moses ben Maimon, author of the Mishneh Torah." Judaism has taken seriously the word of God to the earlier Moses (Deut. 30:12), in giving into his hands the revelation: "It is not in the heavens!" It is up to Israel, to this very day, to make up its collective mind about how it is to interpret revelation and the covenant. As it is written (Deut. 29:29), "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." The written Torah, for example, may have prescribed the penalty of death for certain offenses; the rabbis developed the Oral Torah so that that penalty could never be carried out. They risked making the judgment that God did not want them to execute the judgment that he himself had prescribed!

The issue posed for us by this risk is whether we are willing to talk about revelation here and now, about deciphering God's will for his church and for his world in 1983. If we are, then the human component of revelation that calls for our closest attention is our own, our present reading, hearing and interpreting of a Word of God that must finally be said in our own words now. The author of the Gospel according to Matthew, for example, wrote that a crowd of Jews shouted, "His blood be upon us and upon our children." You and I have to decide whether God willed it then or wills it now that that crowd spoke God's truth, and there is no way you can get around taking that responsibility upon yourself for determining what is and what is not the Word of God, the Word to you - and to those to whom you preach - of the living God. There is no escaping the human component of revelation, and you and I are part of it. How could it be otherwise for a church founded on the Word that became and remains flesh?

That brings me to the last question: can there be a Christology that does justice to the church's experience, yet which makes room for the experience of others? The question is not whether our Christology leaves room for others,

but whether it actually makes room, requires space, for the rest of God's creation. I do not think that Christology from below will help us here. To start with the historical Jesus is to begin with a Jew firmly grounded on the plain of history, and many others stand on that plain. Tolerance can therefore be established on that base, but not more than tolerance. If, however, we wish to actually create space, require the presence of the other as other, then right from the start, we need to begin painting with a bigger brush. I believe that in this matter, as in so much else, Karl Barth remains one of our basic resources, and that in the theological education in which we all need to be engaged today, he remains one of our most stimulating and provocative teachers. Following Barth's lead then, I suggest we stick by the classical tradition and begin with God.

Christology is the analysis of what we say that God was and is doing in Jesus Christ. The God in question is the God of Israel, of whom Israel assures us that he is also King of the Universe. He is the Giver of his Torah and the Maker of his covenant, but also Creator of heaven and earth. Whatever it was that God was doing in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, he was doing it as God of the covenant of Sinai and as Creator of the whole world. God's action in Christ has, therefore, to do with the covenant and Israel, and also with his whole creation.

The relationship between these two assertions has its ground in the two things which the apostolic witness forces us to say about that Jew from Galilee. He was, first of all, a Jew who fully identified himself with his people, and whose whole concern was with them in their covenant. He said, according to that witness, that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and he ordered his disciples to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5-6). The renewal of Israel, that Israel truly be Israel, would seem to have been his whole concern. On the other hand, his effect was primarily outside of Israel. (What God accomplished through him was the Gentile church. Israel's renewal was accomplished through the rabbis of Javneh, rather than through the rabbi from Nazareth.)

The tension between the particularity of the covenant and the totality of creation, or between Jesus' exclusive concern for Israel and his effect outside of Israel, comes into sharp expression in the claim of the Fourth Gospel, that this Jew is the Way, and that no one comes to the Father except through him. The first question we have to ask about this claim is how Israel fits into it. The answer that seems to me to be unshakable in the apostolic witness is that in this Jew God confirmed his covenant with Israel. All God's promises find their Yes in him, as the Apostle Paul put it. So, I find Franz Rosenzweigs tour de force, in commenting on the claim of the Fourth Gospel, to have its

merit, whatever one may think of the rest of Rosenzwieg's theology. His comment was that it is true: no one comes to the Father but through Jesus, but of course, the Jewish people do not have to come to the Father because they are already and always with him. The inseparable intimacy (which preserves the utter distinction) between God and Israel, is confirmed and bodied forth for the Gentile world in the Jew from Nazareth.

What about the others, however? Are they all to come to the Father only by way of Jesus? We should be warned by the particularity of Israel and the particularity of the Jew Jesus not to attempt a generalized answer to that question. Instead, we should move case by case. Let me pick only one, the case of the atheists. They are an especially interesting problem for Jews, in the particular form of atheist Israelis, and they are an interesting problem for Christians, in the particular form of the Marxist world.

Now we see the merit of starting from above: the Word of God which is the starting point for Christology is the Word through which creation came into being, the Word which upholds and is addressed to all creation, certainly including the atheists. Starting from the Word of God, the most important thing to say about the atheists is that they belong to that Word. They are his and cannot be otherwise. What God has done in Christ, if he did anything at all, must certainly include them. There is no way in which they can step outside of God's love and his purpose, no matter what they may say or think.

Now we have to ask ourselves a difficult question: are we sure that what God wants most of the atheists is that they become theists? We seem to have assumed that that is so, but are we sure? The issue of Israeli atheists for religious Israelis is quite different from the issue of Marxists for the church, but we must still ask, is God's primary concern that they put on tefillin and keep kosher kitchens, or, in the other case, that they become baptized and start going to church on Sunday? Are we really sure about that? Or could it be that they have their place in God's plan without acknowledging him in just the way that we do?

It has been a long-standing Jewish and also a Christian dream that one day, all creation would praise the Lord in a common voice. Why in one voice? Why not in a whole variety of voices, some with the singing of Psalms, and others with the pursuit of a more just social order? I find it hard to believe that the Word of God is so small-minded as to become flesh in order to make everyone just like me. After all, he didn't have to turn me into a first-century Jew in order to serve him.

I leave the matter there, with more questions than answers, for your further reflection, for your continuing theological education. For I trust you realize that the theological education that you receive in your seminary can only be the beginning. In other times, perhaps, you could have hoped to spend the rest of your lives applying what you had learned in seminary. Not today. Not when God has turned a pope, a Vatican Council, and just about every church synod, one hundred and eighty degrees in your own life time. Not in a day when God has called his people back into their own land and given them again the task of living the eternal covenant in the full framework of national responsibility. God alone knows what he will do more during the course of your ministries, but I think we can be sure that whatever he will do, it will depend upon our cooperation. If you have doubts about that, let your continuing theological education be informed by the lives and insights of your Jewish colleagues and neighbors. Maybe they can help you to see the consequences of the fact that the Word was made flesh and dwells yet in our midst. As it is written, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever."

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The re-printing of this article is
made possible by a grant from

THE SAMUEL AND ISABELLE FRIEDMAN CHARITABLE TRUST

JAAR, XLV/3, Supplement (September, 1977), L:1075-1100*

Affirmation of the Jewish People: a condition of theological coherence

Paul M. van Buren

ABSTRACT

Insofar as the churches do not affirm the existence of the Jewish people, they stand in theological self-contradiction. Such an affirmation, hitherto withheld, would be consistent with a hermeneutical principle at work in the formation of much of Scripture and especially of the Apostolic Writings, new events in Israel's history occasioning reinterpretation of Israel's tradition, so that they might be included as the latest happening in a continuing story.

The formative events leading to the church's originating reinterpretation included not only those of Good Friday and Easter, but also the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Two later historical facts, however, require further reinterpretation, if theological coherence is to be restored to a church claiming dependence on Scripture and so on historical events. It can ignore these facts only at the price of living in self-contradiction, for it would be excluding from its agenda the very class of items within which falls its own origin. One fact concerns the Jews: their survival and continuity, up to and including the existence of the State of Israel. The other fact concerns the church: its having become, early in its history, an almost completely Gentile enterprise, distinguished from other Gentile entities primarily by its inherited Jewish characteristics, especially its vocabulary.

A possible reinterpretation would take the preservation of the Jews as a crucial sign of the faithfulness of God. Jesus would be understood, not as the inaugurator of the messianic age (i.e., not as *Mashiaḥ*), but as the elect Jew (*Christos*) through whom countless Gentiles have been drawn by the Spirit to adore the God of Israel. The church's characteristic doctrine—that of the Trinity—would then be seen to express the peculiarly Gentile (in contrast to the Jewish) apprehension of the One God of Israel.

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To place an eternal value on the existence of the Jewish people has always characterized Judaism /1/. The thesis to be developed and defended in this lecture /2/ is that, insofar as a correspondingly high valuation of the Jewish people does not characterize the Christian churches /3/, they stand in a theological self-contradiction /4/. At first blush, it must seem that for the church /5/ to place an eternal value on the Jewish people would entail a "transvaluation of all its values." I hope to show that although it would indeed require a profound reconsideration of its sources, nature and purpose, it would be a move that nevertheless derives from the heart of the church's convictions and therefore calls only for that endurable turning around (*teshuva*) after being off on a bad trip, which, as with a certain son (Luke 15:11ff., cf. van Buren, 1976:113f.), can make possible a return to one's own home.

The case for an affirmation of the Jewish people as a condition of theological coherence for the church will begin by considering the church in its formative years, when it was forced to reinterpret the tradition which lay behind it in order to make sense of its own experience. The coherence of its view of reality, I shall argue, required this reinterpretation. I shall then call attention to further events which form part of the present experience of the church and which likewise require a reinterpretation of the church's tradition, not least that originating reinterpretation of the first century. I shall then argue the necessity of this reinterpretation, whether viewed in the light of the requirements of an Augustinian tradition and what Krister Stendahl calls "the introspective conscience of the West (78ff.), or considered in relation to the requirements of a more pragmatic and historical understanding, as might appeal to those who in the jargon of the trade are called theologians of praxis (cf. Tracy: chap. 10). In this way, I shall seek to follow the good example of William James's Lowell Lectures of seventy years ago by making my case to both tender- and the tough-minded readers (James: 9-14) /6/.

I. New events, new interpretation: the origins of the church

Recent work in the study of Christian Origins, a field that has grown out of and broadened what in my student days was but a small aspect of New Testament studies, provides us a picture of the contexts of the varying documents which make up the New Testament /7/. The picture is one of communities and authors engaged in sectarian strife, each group concerned to prove to itself, if not so well to the others, that it alone had the true understanding of the tradition and the law of the land, Torah, and that its members constituted the true Israel, the genuine descendants of Abraham /8/. The Jewish sect formed around loyalty to Jesus of Nazareth as the crucified messiah carried out this work of self-definition and self-justification by the traditional method of reinterpreting Torah in the light of what it took to be unavoidably important recent events. History had to be rewritten so as to take into account the last chapter, the one that had been written in their own lifetime.

Today, when our own most recent experience (including what we called back then the civil rights movement, and then the rise in Black consciousness, not to speak of Vietnam and then Watergate) has led us to reinterpret our own history in the United States, we are well placed to understand what those "Jews for Jesus," if the expression may be allowed, were doing. But we should also recall that their sacred tradition itself consisted to a large extent of such reinterpretations. The prophets of Israel had denounced ancient and sacred traditions and institutions in the light of their reading of the times in which they lived, and the Deuteronomic Reform was itself a major reinterpretation of the past. Finally, the books of Chronicles which conclude the Hebrew Scriptures were a model of rewriting history in the light of more recent experience and understanding. It was consistent with this hermeneutical tradition, then, when the Qumran Community, on the one hand, and the Jews loyal to Jesus on the other, rewrote history to take

into account the advent of The Teacher of Righteousness, or, respectively, the crucified messiah. Indeed, the Pharisaic group replaced all others as the leaders of Judaism presumably because they produced an interpretation of the tradition which could account for the destruction of the Temple and the end of the Commonwealth. The Jesus movement that grew into the church and the Pharisaic movement that developed into Rabbinic Judaism were both born out of the Jewish tradition by reinterpretations carried out in the light of what each took to be the pressing events of their own experience, understood as the actions of the God of their Fathers.

So much for a dispassionate, contemporary way of reviewing developments which, for those involved, were seen far from dispassionately and were accompanied by hostility and polemics the fruits of which have been painful indeed. The purpose of this review has been to make the point that for both groups of Jews, as could be expected from their tradition and from the circumstances in which they found themselves, the claim was made that God had been at work in these events from which they originated, and that in each of these developments the faithfulness of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to his people was asserted.

My argument requires, however, that we pay particular attention to the way in which the Jews loyal to Jesus, and then a church becoming increasingly Gentile, reinterpreted the Scriptures in the light of their originating events. If Nils Dahl is correct, it was the fact of the charge and conviction for which Jesus was executed by Pilate that placed the theme of a crucified messiah at the heart of the new Jesus movement /8/. He argues that the Gospels provide evidence that Jesus made no public claim to messiahship before his arrest, although they suggest that he did not deny the charge when it was made. That Jesus expected trouble and perhaps suffering, possibly even death, is allowed, but this falls well within the range of views of the role and fortunes of prophetic figures of Judaism of the time. However the charge may have originated that Jesus claimed to be

messiah, its first public proclamation would therefore appear to have been the title, "King of the Jews," which Pilate had affixed to the cross of execution for all would-be insurrectionists to read.

It seems historically likely that this event would have been the end of the Jesus story had it not been followed by the events of the following *yom rishon*, Easter. The appearances of the risen Jesus to some of his followers, however explained or whether explicable at all, was taken by them as the divine confirmation of the truth of what Pilate had written cynically. These two events, taken together as the latest actions of God in his dealings with people, required that the tradition be reassessed, as we have said, in order for the Jews loyal to Jesus to make sense of reality. So they read the Scriptures with new eyes, looking for and finding hints in all sorts of places that the God who had done the last things was no other than the God who had done earlier things. However new, however unexpected was the fact of a crucified messiah, yet they were convinced as Jews that this was what the whole story of their past had foreshadowed. This event had to be the foreordained act of God as his way of bringing his salvation to his people and to the world. Being both Jews and loyal to Jesus, precisely as Jews for Jesus, they could have done no other.

However unsettling this picture may be for Christians uninformed by the critical historical work of the past century, what I have said so far is not particularly controversial among scholars of Christian origins. Now, however, I must proceed to matters on which there is less agreement. The facts are not in dispute, of course, but the weight that I feel should be attached to those facts are felt only by some and scarcely noted by others.

Two further events took place in the first century which were of the utmost importance in the formation of the Christian church. If we are interested in Christian origins, then we must take these as decisive originating events of the church. The first of these begins with the fact that, increasingly, other Jewish groups resisted

the new interpretation of tradition, the midrash, of the Jews loyal to Jesus. Obviously, a fair number of Jews were drawn to this new movement, or it would never have survived its first months and years. But resistence increased, and with it came another development: the young movement became inundated by waves of Gentile converts (Davies: 373). Already in his letter to the Romans, less than 30 years after the beginning of the movement, Paul seems to have sensed that the church was on its way to becoming a purely Gentile enterprise (cf. Stendahl: 132). By the time of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, the trend had reached such a point that the opponents of the movement could be called simply "the Jews." To what extent the acceptance of Gentiles by this one group of Jews contributed to hostility on the part of other Jews and their rabbinic leadership, is hard to say. I would suggest that we can best understand what took place by considering one further event which began shortly after Paul wrote that letter to Rome and which was to have a profound effect on the future. I refer of course to the war that broke out in 66 and which ended in the destruction of the Temple and the sack of Jerusalem by Titus, and the end of the Jewish Commonwealth.

I cannot stress too strongly the fact that most of the New Testament was written after this event (Baeck: 78ff.). Probably Mark, certainly the other three Gospels, the non-Pauline letters, and the book of Revelation all come after and reflect this traumatic event. It too was taken into the consciousness of the young church as the latest event in the continuing story of God's dealings with his people and his plan for the salvation of the world. No less than for the rabbis, that defeat had to be seen as a further chapter of the story, and the tradition had to be interpreted in such a way as to take account of this new and fearful thing. Whatever we may think of it today, this terrible event was seen by the rabbis as the punishment due to Israel for its failures in the past to observe Torah as the rabbis said it should be observed. For the church, the same event was

seen as the confirmation of its most recent experience of reception by Gentiles, and so of the divine rejection of a Judaism hostile to its midrash. To what extent this hostility was augmented by the refusal of the Jews loyal to Jesus to identify with and stand by their fellow Jews in the conflict with Rome, we cannot be sure. Our own experience of radical hostility within one society between those of opposed views about our own latest war in Southeast Asia, suggests in a low key what may have taken place. When hawks and doves can come to believe each other to be Communists and Fascists, during a war thousands of miles away, the polemics of Matthew and John become more understandable, reflecting as they do the tensions of a war at home. I suggest the historical analogy only as a way to assist in our understanding of the split and the venom of the resulting polemics, not at all to excuse them /10/.

Again, my purpose here is to draw attention to the way in which the most recent events were taken by the developing church into its consciousness to become a key to reading and reinterpreting the past. The speech of Stephen in the seventh chapter of Acts, for example, whatever its historical kernel from the early days may be, was written by Luke after the events to which we have referred. It matches the books of Chronicles in rewriting history in order to take into account what its author took to be the latest chapter. In the context in which Luke placed it, it makes little sense psychologically or historically. Set in the date of its composition it makes painful but historical and psychological sense.

Again I would stress that there was a certain inevitability in the move made by Luke and other Christian authors writing after the year 70, however we may now judge the negative side of their polemics. On the positive side, they were concerned to show the continuity of history, because they believed, as perhaps some of us still believe, that the history in which they were and we are involved, was and is a part of a developing, continuing interaction between this world and its Creator. Believing that this was God's world, that Israel was

God's people, and also that what happened in the events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth was God's doing, how could they not take these latest events of a Gentile inundation, the destruction of the Temple, and the increasing hostility of the rest of the Jews, as themselves part of that same story begun in Genesis and continuing through Chronicles and on into the days through which they were living? When one considers the reticence of contemporary Jewish theologians to give an explanation in this or any other fashion of the Holocaust, one might wish that the theologians of the early church had exercised a comparable restraint. (That Christian thinkers today are more ready than Jewish thinkers to suggest some theory to account for the Holocaust is but one more illustration of the fact that we are all better at explaining each others problems than we are our own!)

Before turning to the second step in my argument, I should perhaps point out that at least one second century Christian saw in these New Testament polemics something that was surely there to see, if one were willing to accept its consequences. Marcion saw in that first century conflict the possibility that the church was in fact the advocate and locus of a totally new religion, utterly displacing that of Israel /11/. The consequence of such a theory was of course that the God of Israel, the God of Moses and the prophets, and--one must add--the God whom Jesus called Father, turns out to be a false god. The self-contradiction of the position was sufficiently clear for the church to refuse Marcion's theory, at least officially. Here, as in the case of the church's official rejection of Gnosticism, one should perhaps reserve judgment as to whether the official rejection was to prove sufficient. In the popular piety of the church of succeeding centuries, the theory of Marcion and the pagan spirituality of Gnosticism have hardly been strangers.

II. Further events calling for reinterpretation of the tradition.

In order to make sense of its own experience, in

order to make coherent its view of reality, the early church had to reinterpret what it believed to be its own tradition in the light of those events through which it lived and which touched the heart of the matters spoken of in that tradition. History, however, has not stood still, nor has the problem of its interpretation come to a halt with the close of the New Testament writings. I want to call attention now to two events or historical developments which have occurred since the close of that Canon, which likewise touch the very heart of matters central to the Scriptural tradition and, insofar as they seem strange or unexpected in the light of the interpretations of the first century, threaten the coherence of the church's understanding of reality. They therefore call urgently for further interpretation or reinterpretation of the church's Scriptures, both its inherited Hebrew tradition and its more recently acquired Greek tradition /12/. The facts are two, each having two aspects; the first has to do with the Jews, and the second has to do with the church.

The first fact about the Jews is that they are here, still very much here. The people of Israel, the people of the Scriptures, Israel after the flesh--and what other kind of Israel could there ever by?--endures. The Jews are alive, not as the types and symbols which the church's theology has invented, but as a flesh and blood people. Despite centuries of the church's teaching of contempt, despite all the pogroms and persecution and senseless killing either directly or sometimes quite indirectly the fruit of such teaching, the Jewish people survives. Even after the most systematic, rationalized, technologically engineered genocide of all history, carried out with all the skills of university educated professionals, still the Jewish people lives. If ever a people could claim continuity with its past, then the Jews are that people. By literature and tradition, by language and custom, by prayer, worship and cult, by self-understanding and self-identity, the biblical children of Israel, the Jews of the first century and through all the time of Christendom, and the Jewish people today, are one.

This people which is the central subject and protagonist of the Scriptures, this people is living right now in our midst. And indeed for the church in the United States, the matter is made yet more pressing by the fact that there are more Jews in this country than in any other in the world. If ever there were a fact of history that must be taken into account by the church, this is that fact.

The second aspect of this first fact of the Jews is intimately related to their existence: that is the existence of the State of Israel. Once more, after all these centuries of praying and longing, the Jews are again in the land of their fathers. Of course, there have been Jews living there in varying numbers and varying conditions all the time, but they have had to live there, often as foreigners, in a land under the control of others (Isaac). Now once more it is their land, under their own Jewish government. In a proportion comparable to that existing in the first century, the Jews are once more in the Land of Promise. Here again is a strange fact, one clearly not forseen by any author of the New Testament, but a fact which stands now for all to see, certainly including the Christian church.

The roots of the State of Israel are as deep and as old as the roots of the Jewish people (Parkes). They go back to the promise of this particular land made to this particular people. Judaism has kept alive Jewish faith in this promise and Jewish hope for renewal of its realization. There are, of course, many Jews who do not believe in that promise, because they do not think of themselves as the chosen people. If secularized Jews think of the matter at all, they may more likely think of themselves as the descendents of those who thought of themselves as the chosen people. But if they think of themselves as Jews at all, then they tend to think of themselves as a people, and one bound together in part by their connection with that land and the "young" Jewish State. It is indeed hard to find a Jew today who has no sense of solidarity with the State of Israel. Without pursuing further the complex of differing Jewish

responses to the founding of the State, let me simply leave the matter there as a historical fact in all its ambiguity that cries aloud for the deepest thinking on the part of a church that believes in one of whom the apostle Paul wrote, "He is the Yes pronounced upon God's promises, every one of them" (2 Cor 1:20, *NEB*).

I turn now to the second fact, no more esoteric than the plain fact of the existence of Jews and of the State of Israel. The second fact to which I wish to call attention is that the church, although beginning as a purely Jewish movement, did not only become a community made up of Jews and Gentiles, as we read of it in the writings of the New Testament. It became, probably not long after the New Testament period an almost purely Gentile enterprise. When one recalls the attention which the authors of the New Testament gave to the importance of the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church, and then realizes that that problem has disappeared from our agenda, for the simple reason that there are practically no Jews in the church now, one cannot help but wonder how the church has continued to read its own Greek Scriptures without pondering the implications and consequences of the fact that it has become such a Gentile enterprise, that the term "Jewish-Christian" has no place in its lexicon, except as a reference to the distant past of its beginnings.

As the church currently sees things, it may number some ex-Jews within its number, and there are such fringe sects as those known as "Jews for Jesus," but there has simply ceased to be what the first century church knew as Jewish-Christians, Jews who like Paul had a profound sense of their Jewish identity and so who saw themselves and were seen by their fellow Christians as a vital sign in the heart of the church of the continuity of the church with the history of Israel and a guarantee of the love for the church of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The disappearance of that sign and guarantee would seem to be a fact worth thinking about for a church that has become a Gentile enterprise.

The Gentile character of the church is made all the more thought-provoking if we consider a second aspect of what has taken place. The church is not only made up almost exclusively of Gentiles, but these are Gentiles who, when they wish to speak of those things which matter to them most, use an essentially Jewish vocabulary (Wyschogrod: 107f.). Listen to yourselves, my fellow Gentiles, and be amazed! You speak of the Law and the Prophets, of sin and redemption, of Creation and Covenant, of Election and Israel, of Holiness and the Sabbath, of forgiveness and reconciliation, of hope and the resurrection; every one of these is a Jewish word and a Jewish concept! Translated they may be, or sometimes only transliterated, but these are the Jewish terms with the help of which the church throughout its history has expressed its deepest convictions.

I feel obliged to add that qualifier, "throughout its history," because it is just possible, at least in some quarters, that the church in this present time may be losing its ability to use its inherited vocabulary. In many congregations one is more likely to hear such non-Jewish terms as "stewardship" and "outreach," than the terms I have mentioned. And the theologians of the hour seem to speak far more the "dipolar panentheism," for example and "the contemporary scientific worldview," than they are of Creation and Covenant, or of Election and Israel /13/: As I said, we have not heard the last of Marcion.

Yet if the church survives at all, then it is my judgment that these passing fancies of the moment, in which incidently much good may lurk, will not eradicate the Jewishness locked into the traditional vocabulary of this Gentile enterprise called the church.

Interestingly enough, and for obvious reasons, the church's principal symbol is not at all Jewish. It is purely Gentile, being the instrument of criminal execution of the Romans. Otherwise, altar, priesthood, candles, holy book, a yearly calendar of feasts and fasts, divided into seven-day weeks, and even its principal cultic rite, all show signs of their derivation from Jewish forms and practice. In its practice

as well as in its vocabulary, then, the Gentile church is distinguished from all other Gentile institutions by its Jewish features.

III. Reinterpretation in the light of these facts.

Why are historical facts important to the church /14/? Why does the church have to take history seriously? The answer is simply because history is and has always been the locus of what the church has called revelation. History is the consequence of God's act of creation, as the church has always understood creation. History has been the place of God's self-revelatory events and the place of human response which has made up the content of those Scriptures held to be authoritative by the church. It would be odd indeed for this seriousness about history to be limited to the history that begins with Abraham and concludes with the writing of the book of Revelation. That would seem to imply that God's love and mercy and judgment did not apply to any time after the first century, that He ceased to be concerned with and related to history after the close of the Canon, as if He could or would no more be related to His creation and His people as He always had been, namely, by way of the events of history.

The historical facts which we are considering, moreover, are not just random facts. They are facts concerning the Jewish people and the church, the two communities which not only produced the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek New Testament, but which are themselves importantly part of the subject matter of those writings. He who reads the Hebrew Bible reads primarily of the people of Israel, of what they did and said and of what happened to them /15/. The tradition of the church's study of its own continuing history testifies to its awareness that it does not think that the history of God's concern with His people came to a stop with the close of the Scriptural Canon. One can only be astonished, then, at its failure to give a comparable attention to the continuing history of the people of Israel. When one considers the high regard that the church has given to the biblical

account of Israel's history, and then adds to that the fact that Israel's history continued and continues to this day, the silence of the church on this matter must appear utterly incoherent. One wonders by what principle or logic the defeat of the Jews by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 16:10-15, 31:27-34. Cf. Sanders: 383) and their slaughter by the Romans under Titus (Mark 13:14, Matt 22:7) can count as occasions for new understandings of God's ways with his world, but not the annihilation of the Jews of Europe by the Germans under Hitler /16/. Or again, by what principle or logic does the establishment of the Jews in the land of promise under Joshua, and again after the Babylonian captivity, count as occasions for new understandings of God's faithfulness to His people, but not the return of 1948? It seems almost as it those naughty young theologians of the Death-of-God, some dozen years ago, were only exposing the orthodox theology of a church whose official God was so removed from historical events of our time that He might as well have been dead.

My argument is a simple one. If historical events, and especially the facts and events which I have enumerated, are not taken with utmost seriousness by a church that claims to nourish its thought and life by the Bible, then its thought and life become totally incoherent. It can ignore such facts only at the price of living in self-contradiction, for it excludes from its agenda the very class of items in which fall its own origin. Nor is it any rejoinder for the church to plead the principle of *sola scriptura* as grounds for not searching more recent history for the finger of God; it is precisely that very *scriptura* which itself demands that history be taken with the greatest seriousness.

Let us consider how the church might begin to reinterpret its traditions in the light of the further facts of the continuing history of the Jewish people and its own Gentile character. The church, of course, is made up of many sorts, so we shall follow William James here and consider both the tender-minded and the tough-minded, not as alternatives, but as complementary. From

the two we shall reach a fairer, more balanced conclusion than that to which we could be lead by either type alone.

I shall begin with the tender-minded, or to transpose to a theological mode, the Lutheran type, in contrast to the Calvinist type. If Catholics feel left out by such terms, they need not, for Augustine is of course the great father of what Stendahl has called "the introverted conscience of the West." For Augustine, Luther and other Christians of this type, the central petition of the Lord's Prayer must ever be, "Forgive us our sins" /14/. For such Christians, the central concern has been to assure themselves of the mercy and so the faithfulness of God. If it should turn out that, contrary to the conviction of Paul, (Rom 11:29, 9:4) the promises of God are revocable, then what hope can any man have? So it must be the case, if Christian hope is at all well founded, that God remains eternally true to his Covenant and so to His covenant people. In such case, the sheer survival of the Jewish people, in the face of the persecutions they have endured, becomes a vital sign of the faithfulness of God. The Jews in their very existence have become the sure sign of God's faithfulness, also for the Gentile church.

The point could then be made, once established on these lines, in a purely intra-Christian way, that if Christ did not die for Judas, then Peter is without hope. Both betrayed Jesus and both repented bitterly; if the cross is of no help to the one, then it is of no help for the other. So for the church the existence of the Jewish people must be a matter of its deepest concern, for with that existence stands or falls its own grounds for confidence in its God. If God will not stand by His side of the Covenant with the Jews--and this is precisely the terrifying question which has been raised by the Holocaust in our own days--then what hope has any man? The Holocaust was bad enough. If the Jews were again to suffer anything like a commensurate disaster, the credibility of the God of the promises would be shaken to the foundations.

But the reinterpretation cannot stop here. It must go further and cut deeper. Indeed, the fact of the continuing reality of the Jewish people, a fact from which the church cannot turn away, requires a reinterpretation that goes to the heart of the church's faith, but not, as we shall see, in a destructive way. We have seen that the very beginning of the church's originating reinterpretation of Jewish tradition was triggered by a Gentile judgment that Jesus was a messianic pretender: "Kings of the Jews." We may assume that his first followers in the earliest days following Easter called him, in their own tongue, *Yeshúa Mashiah*, Jesus Messiah. In the earliest records which we have, however, he is called *Iesous Christos*. The translation into the Greek should itself alert us to the fact that already to have called Jesus the messiah, in Aramaic, was to have used the term in a way radically different from its normal Jewish meaning (Dahl: 29, 141). And by the end of the first century, who or what had Jesus in fact turned out to be? King of the Jews? Not at all. Israel's messiah? Hardly. Israel's messiah, in all the variety of ways in which the figure has been imagined, is marked and identifiable as the inaugurator of the messianic age. The messianic age, in turn, is marked by radical historical transformation. So the rule can stand: no beating of swords into plowshares, no messiah. It is as simple as that. After all these succeeding centuries of wars and cruelty, death and disease, can we have any doubts whether the messianic age has come? And after the carnage and horrors of this lovely twentieth century, above all in the face of one million dead Jewish children /18/, dare any Christian say that Jesus was or is the messiah of Israel?

Who or what then did Jesus in fact prove to be? The answer is so obvious that it is not noticed: he was and is just what the Gentile church said he was. He proved himself to be the Christ of the Gentiles. According to Gershon Scholem, the great sixteenth century Kabbalist Isaac Luria taught that human souls can have a great influence for good on the souls of many others (252f.). The idea may be older in the history of Jewish mysticism, for my colleague Zalmon Schacter claims that

one obscure passage in the *Zohar* teaches that there are, as it were, head- or chief-souls to which many other souls belong and through whom they may be drawn to the presence of God /19/. However young or old the idea may be, it provides us one way of speaking of what Jesus proved to be for countless Gentiles, the one Jewish soul through whom these many Gentiles came to adore the One whom Jesus--and every faithful Jew--knows as Father.

To put the matter in another way, Pontius Pilate, the only Gentile named in the Creeds of the Gentile church, turned out to be right. As Pilate surely thought, Jesus was not in fact the King of the Jews, even if Pilate was probably wrong in thinking that Jesus had ever laid claim to such a title. Instead, Jesus was the Christ of the Gentile church, the one Jew through whom Gentiles in fact came to call upon the God of Israel and to worship the God of the Jews as also their God. Because of him, the Gentile church came to hope that it too had a place within the promise of God to his people, the Jews. He has proved to be, by the historical facts which we have enumerated, the Word of Israel's God to the Gentiles, and Gentiles who have seen him have seen all that Gentiles can see and need to see of Israel's God. By such a reinterpretation of its traditions, an interpretation which takes into account the further facts of our continuing history, the faith of tender-minded Christianity is by no means destroyed. On the contrary, from the fidelity of God to his beloved people Israel, and from the fact of a Gentile church, Christians may quiet their introspective anxiety about how they may find a gracious God.

I turn now to the concerns of another type of Christian, which could be represented in the person of Jean Calvin. These are the tough-minded, the empirically, factually minded members of the Gentile church, for whom, for example, the doctrine of Creation, a real creation of a real, concrete world, has always been clearer and more central than it ever was for Augustine. For Calvin, the central petition of the Lord's Prayer could only have been, "Thy will be done...on earth, as

it is in heaven." For Christians of this sort, the facts have always mattered, because to do the will of God requires some understanding of the situation in which that will is to be done.

Let us begin, then, with the facts of the survival and continuity of the Jewish people and the existence of the State of Israel. What these facts shout in our faces is that the story, the strange epic of God's history with his people, and his people's history with him, is still going on. For too long the church has talked about the covenant and God's self-revelation in the past tense only. For too long the church has talked about "history as revelation" and meant by that a history that came to a close in the first century. But the fact of Jewish continuity is a fact of the present tense. (I am always amused when I come across the section in any theological library that has all those books on the history of Israel. I don't have to open them to know that I will find no mention whatsoever of the long and eventful history of Israel during the past nineteen centuries, not to speak of its traumatic history still unfolding of these past forty-five years.)

The State of Israel is certainly an ambiguous fact. It is as ambiguous as the rest of the history of the people of Israel, even as ambiguous as the church and its history. It is ambiguous, especially, as Easter is ambiguous, a mighty sign for those who see, no sign at all for those who don't. But then the signs of God have never been all that clear. And that certainly applies to that other powerful and terrifying event of our century, the Holocaust. Photographs of the survivors can recall to us the words of Deutero-Isaiah as though intended as captions for the occasion: "his form, disfigured, lost all the likeness of a man, his beauty changed beyond human semblance. He was despised...tormented and humbled by suffering; we despised him, we held him of no account, a thing from which men turn away the eyes..." (Isa 53:2-3, *NEB*). Dare we go further and say "he bore our sufferings," or that he was "tortured for our iniquities" (Isa 53:45 *NEB*)? These lines have

been applied by the church to Jesus; can they be applied also to these other Jews? Was there something about our whole western civilization, including the part played in forming that civilization by the church itself, that was brought under judgment before our eyes? I cannot do more--as I cannot do less--than put the question. Auschwitz does not lend itself to answers. But I can say that the Christian who will look at these facts must share with Elie Wiesel a revulsion at any suggestion that the founding of the State of Israel is any sort of compensation for Auschwitz, just as the church must object to seeing Easter as a compensation for the cross. What is certain is that the agony of the Holocaust cries out for the church's attention, for it raises fearful questions. It raises the question about the faithfulness of God to his promises. What good is it to be reconciled over all Augustinian self-doubts to a God who does not keep his promises? Or is that what we are to make of Auschwitz? Was there a commanding and so revelatory word spoken out of those fires, as Emil Fackenheim proclaims, or is it rather, as Irving Greenberg and Wiesel at least imply, that what we have to hear from those flames is a significant silence? It seems almost as if the silence were pressing the church to say something it has yet to say, and as if the refusal to act on God's part were pressing mankind to do something it has yet to do. From the full history of Israel, the history up to today, the church will have much to learn, and not least that it is hard, very hard to trust in God's promises, just as it may begin to learn to speak less of God's word and more of his silence, less of his presence and more of his absence, less of his power and impassibility, and more of his weakness and suffering.

The Gentile church also has much to learn from the living Israel about the arts of midrash. It might learn to recall what Israel's name means and begin to learn itself what it is to wrestle with God (Gen 32:29). In so doing, it may even begin to wrestle in a new way with its own beloved New Testament. Torah is, to say the

least, as dear to the Jews as the New Testament is to the church, yet the Jews have been putting hard questions to the Torah from the beginning. So the facts of history since the New Testament could and should lead the church to raise its own sharp questions about its Holy Writ. More important, if it begins to develop what can be called the sense of humor, even the playfulness which occasionally appears in Jewish midrash, it may find a constructive way to begin to deal with all that really nasty anti-Judaic polemic which the New Testament contains. A Gentile church reading those passages with a sense of humor might both smile and weep over such a venomous polemic between fellow Jews, and then feel all the more humble over the fact that it was only because of this nastiness that Gentiles could come to have a place in that story. This would seem to me a far healthier way to deal with those polemics than trying to pretend that they aren't there or never happened /20/. Those very passages that have caused suffering and death for Jews for so long could become themselves a source of new understanding for a church that took seriously its own Gentile identity and affirmed the fact of the Jewish people.

Finally, when these facts are accepted by the church, it will help her to see the simplicity and inevitability of her own distinctive teaching, the doctrine of the Trinity. That doctrine, seen in this light, expresses nothing less than the only possible Gentile apprehension of the God of the Jews. It comes directly out of their own Gentile experience. Drawn by the divine spirit, by way of the Jew Jesus, only in this way can Gentiles apprehend the God of Israel /21/. He whom the Jews know as Father, the Gentiles know as Father only through Jesus, the Christ for the Gentiles, because this is how the Spirit of God has drawn them to worship him. The *Credo* is therefore the only properly experiential, historical way in which the Gentile can affirm the God of the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one." A Jew can say that. The Gentiles can only adore this God in the way in which this one God has made Himself

known to them: through the Jew Jesus, the Christ of the Gentiles. Here as in so many other ways, the Jews in their concrete reality can serve the church by being a continual reminder that faith is not a "head-trip," and that our theology, when at its best, has its feet firmly painted on the ground of historical experience.

I have argued the case for the church's affirmation of the Jewish people. That affirmation would not require that the church throw anything away that it has valued. It does not even require for the church a new orientation. All that is required is that it open its eyes to the facts, take them seriously, and then do what the church has always done: reinterpret its tradition in the light of these facts, so as to take the present into its past and so its past up into the present. That, I have argued, is just how the church began. That is what the Catholic church has done all along under the name of the authority of oral tradition. That is surely what the Protestant church has also done in the light of its renovating experience and resulting confessions in the sixteenth century. For the Gentile church, the affirmation of the Jewish people is only obedience to the logic of its past. It is a condition of the coherence of its theology.

NOTES

/1/ Nowhere to my knowledge has this been expressed more grandly than in Rosenzweig, but it is evident in any anthology of Jewish sources and literature.

/2/ This paper was originally presented under the auspices of the Lowell Institute and the Boston University School of Theology as the Lowell Lecture for the Spring, 1977.

/3/ See Yerushalmi for a more judicious review of the evidence than Ruether allows.

/4/ How long the churches can survive such a self-contradiction or at what cost leave it uncorrected, I shall not consider; history counsels caution about predictions of the longevity of self-contradictory human institutions. The thesis is limited to the subject of theological self-consistency or coherence.

/5/ Since the issue confronts all the churches equally, I shall simply use the singular, "church," to refer collectively to all the various forms or branches of Christianity. As in this matter it is more correct to speak of "the Jewish people" rather than of "Judaism," so by the same principle of letting each party define itself, I shall speak of "the church" rather than "Christianity."

/6/ Compare also Leo Baeck's distinction between "classical" and "romantic" religion.

/7/ The following is the summary of one not a scholar of Christian origins, but I have been particularly helped by the work of N. A. Dahl, K. Stendahl, W. D. Davis, and D. R. A. Hare, as well as by a series of lectures given by Alan Segal and Donald Juel in the seminar on Judaism sponsored by the Princeton Theological Seminary and the Anti-Defamation League in February, 1977.

/8/ This applies to the Qumran community as well as to the early Jesus movement.

/9/ See especially the title essay.

/10/ See Gaston for a stimulating analysis of the consequences of the split and the resulting requirement of reinterpretation for the *Gospel of Matthew*.

/11/ As the words are used today, it makes no sense to speak of Judaism as a "religion" (as distinct from what?). Perhaps in the second century it could have been so called, for the distinction between religion and "the secular" would have been as meaningless for a second century person such as Marcion as it has always been for Jews, with the possible exception of those seduced by Emancipation into sharing the naive and somewhat romantic infatuation with the Enlightenment that characterized

their Gentile neighbors.

/12/ The issue of coherence in contemporary theology is generally seen to reside in the possible conflict between Christian faith and modernity on the one hand or contemporary metaphysics on the other (Tracy: *passim*.). When one reviews the questionable credentials of modernity (Greenberg: 28ff.) and the ambiguous state of contemporary metaphysics (see numerous questions by Van Harvey to Schubert Ogden), it does not seem to me that most theologians, not to speak of such critics as Kai Nielsen, have come close to seeing how much greater the danger of incoherence is when raised historically.

/13/ Cf., for example, Tracy and others whom he numbers with himself as "revisionist" theologians.

/14/ I am assuming that the complexity of our use of the word "fact" is understood and that positivistic simplifications are not to be thought worthy of further discussion. Cf. the discussion of this in van Buren (1972:58f., 159-166).

/15/ This is one of Barth's more important theological discoveries in *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (§34, II/2). Cf. also Marquandt.

/16/ This is *not* to propose an interpretation of the Holocaust. It is a demand that it become an occasion for the church's reflection. For a provocative lead, the church could begin by consulting Greenberg.

/17/ I owe this classification-by-means-of-petitions to Barth, made twenty-five years ago in a seminar on Luther's 1520 writings, but cf. Baeck (211).

/18/ Greenberg offers this as a critical test for every theological statement made after the Holocaust (23).

/19/ His reference to the *Zohar*, III, 98a, is not clear to me, but the mysteries of the *Zohar* were never meant to be transparent to the uninitiated!

/20/ The implication that parts of the New Testament should be excised as far as use by the church is concerned is evident in the writings of Pawlikowski (173f.) and Ruether (259f.).

/21/ To be more precise, Gentiles can apprehend the God of Israel *as the God of Israel* only in this way. The evident fact that Jesus has proved to be the Christ only for some Gentiles suggests the possibility that God has other ways of making Himself known to other Gentiles, e.g., Muslims?, Buddhists? On this, sacred scriptures and our tradition give us no guidance. Without attempting to settle that, our thesis directs itself only to a Christian's apprehension of the God which the church itself affirms to be the God of Israel. This suggests that as the church's relation to the Jewish people is of

a fundamentally different order from its relation to "other religions," so among the religions, Islam will have a place of priority on that other agenda. But "sufficient unto the day...."

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JAAR XLV/4 (1977), 491–495

Christian Theology and Jewish Reality: An Essay-Review

Paul M. van Buren

ABSTRACT

Reflection on the Holocaust, to which these collected papers from the 1974 symposium in New York contribute and invite us, has led to a new respect for Judaism that marks an important development in Jewish-Christian relations. Of the many valuable contributions, Prof. Yerushalmi's critique of Rosemary Ruether's thesis, Siirala's analysis of Luther on the Jews, Waskow's vision of Judaism's messianic hope, and Wiesel's story-telling warrant particular note. Of unusual interest is Irving Greenberg's presentation of the Holocaust as counter-evidence to Jewish and Christian claims. In the face of burning children, he sees as possible only what he calls "moment faith"; he finds unwarranted the faith of a secularity which proved powerless to prevent the horrors of this century. These papers raise doubts about the openness of contemporary theologians to the faith of secularity, but the more fundamental issue raised is that of taking into account recent events in Israel's history when speaking of history as revelation.

Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Edited by Eva Fleischner, New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1977. xix 469 pages. $6.95. L. C. No. 76–53809.

The International Symposium on the Holocaust, held at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York in June, 1974, was one of the more conspicuous events among those which have marked a strange new stage in the relations between Christians and Jews. The Christian church no longer has the power to mark out historical eras, but events beyond its control may yet do so. Whether the Holocaust was such an event, at least in the history of Christian-Jewish relations, something new does seem to be happening: Christians in increasing numbers are beginning to try to understand Judaism on its own terms, for a change, and are struggling not

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only to turn away from the "teaching of contempt" that has marked the long history of the church but to find ways in which to affirm theologically the existence of the Jewish people. Such a shift in the attitude of one major religious tradition to another is, from the perspective of the history of religions, no small matter, for it must, if carried through, entail a change in the very self-understanding of Christians. That may not mark a new era, but it would be a change in the history of Christianity of some importance for Jews as well as Christians.

If it took the systematic murder of six million Jews to initiate this change in Christianity, one must wonder whether the result is worth the cost. Nevertheless, if nothing good were to follow upon such horror, the situation would be even worse. Reflection on the Holocaust, therefore, is an activity which, though far from easy, is to be recommended to thoughtful Christians, all the more as their own long history of antisemitism formed part of the background of what took place in Europe from 1933 to 1945. An event of such magnitude in the history of that people who constitute the subject matter of the Scriptures which Christians hold to be sacred must in any case be a cause for the most serious attention by Christian thinkers, as well as by any who wish to understand either Christianity or Judaism.

It is therefore important that we have made available to us the papers of that Symposium of 1974, and their authors and especially the editor have placed us in their debt. Dr. Fleischner has arranged and introduced the material under a series of headings reflecting the variety of ways in which the speakers understood or were asked to relate their papers to the central theme of the Symposium. The headings range from direct confrontation with the issue of theological responses to the Holocaust to such topics as Black-Jewish relations and the New Left and Israel. (Some of the papers reflect the Yom Kippur War which took place while preparations for the symposium were underway.)

The papers represent a wide variety of material and are of uneven quality and value, but each one merits reading and several are alone worth far more than the modest price of the book. The volume in its entirety would be an invaluable addition to the reading list of any course on the Holocaust and it should find its place also in the hands of any who are concerned with the viability of either Judaism or Christianity. Indeed, it is worth the serious attention of anyone who cares to defend the value of human survival after what we human beings have shown we can do to each other in this century. The question mark in the title is not incidental.

Without attempting to do justice to the rich menu which Dr. Fleischner has laid before us, I shall single out a few essays that must receive comment, and then give special attention to one that seems to me to be of special importance. Because of the wide attention that Rosemary Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide* has received, the response of Professor Yerushalmi to a paper presenting substantially the same argument as her book is especially important. He argues that Ruether's black picture of Christian antisemitism cannot be the whole story because it does not explain the fact that the Jews

survived in Christendom. His essay is a masterpiece of historical judiciousness, all the more welcome coming as it does from a Jewish scholar. That I add this remark is a sign of how difficult it is to be objective and all the more an endorsement of Professor Yerushalmi's balanced historical judgment.

Also worthy of special note is Aarne Siirala's analysis of Luther's theology as it bears on the Jews, an essay not immune from Leo Baeck's criticism of 'romantic religion' but nonetheless honest and constructive. Thomas Hopko's critique of John Pawlikowski's paper brings the needed voice of the Eastern Orthodox tradition into the discussion, however painful it may be, and the 'statement' of Gabriel Habib, an Arab Christian, which could so easily have been edited out, has also been included, to the credit of the editor. A fascinating contribution of Arthur Waskow's imaginative visions of Israel's messianic hope is a singular addition to the discussion. Finally, Elie Wiesel, the story-teller, tells stories that simply have to be listened to if one is going to consider the Holocaust at all. These and many others add to the richness of this collection, but I must turn to the essay that introduces the book and which, setting the tone and standard of the whole, should be required reading for any serious theologian of the future.

Irving Greenberg's reflections on where we stand as Jews, Christians or simply human beings, after what has taken place in our century by the hand of those trained in the ways most valued by our culture, is one of the more thought-provoking essays produced in some decades. With the help of citations from eye witnesses, Greenberg presents the Holocaust as radical counter-evidence to the claims of every religion of redemption. The faith of Judaism and Christianity in the value of human existence is mocked by this event; both the Jew's faith in God's Promises and the Christian's faith in Jesus as "one who transforms and will transform the world" must seem illusory in this light.

Not only religion but modernity itself with its secular humanistic liberal faith, the Enlightenment and its claims to universal rationality, and certainly the modern university, all proved incompetent to resist this actualization of the demonic potential in modern culture. From these observations Greenberg draws a methodological principle for living after such an event: "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children." Burning children, not only at Auschwitz but also at Hiroshima and in Vietnam are a warning of the danger in which we stand and a test of whether our words are on the side of life or death.

Greenberg argues that the Holocaust confronts Judaism, Christianity, and indeed humanity, with a demand for change. If the Holocaust is ignored it will be repeated; if faced, it cannot simply be assimilated to traditional categories. Either it will mark the end of faith altogether, or it will become for us a reorienting event, that is, revelation. Both Judaism and Christianity have resisted claims of new revelations but Greenberg argues that to allow ourselves to be reoriented by this event is the only alternative to giving up faith

altogether. The faith that remains possible is what he calls "moment faith," one that knows long stretches of deadness when God is silent. More than that is not credible in the presence of burning children, for in their presence God is not present and so continuous faith is impossible.

But 'moment faith' is possible and far more worthy of our adherence than disbelief, which is the faith of that secularity within the framework of which the Holocaust took place. After Auschwitz, the burden of proof is squarely on the shoulders of any who would argue the merits of the secular. Nevertheless, moment faith, because it is only that, will do without the pretentions and the talk of traditional faith. Ours is a time for theological silence appropriate to a time of God's silence. The need of the hour is not talk but building and working for human life, which is the image of God, and for resisting every cultural and religious denial of the absolute value of the other. At the same time, a special demand is placed on Christians to begin to quarrel with their own beloved Gospels, insofar as those Gospels helped to pave the way for Jew-hatred.

Greenberg's essay, supported as it is by the whole collection, raises at least two issues of importance. The first is whether theologians and believers generally do well to place high on their agendas the task of coming to terms with that "contemporary scientific world-view" which itself shaped the horrors of the twentieth century. Since there appeared no resources in the faith of secularity to prevent Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Mylai, theologians who argue that Christian faith is "none other than the most adequate articulation of the basic faith of secularity itself" (D. Tracy) would appear to be offering us a lead similar to that provided by the theologians of the *Deutsche Christen*. Greenberg has raised a question about the theological agenda that demands attention.

The second issue which is raised by Greenberg and the authors of many of the papers is whether it is right to regard this or any other event in modern history as a reorienting event, whether we dare consider including the present when we reflect on 'history as revelation.' Both Judaism and Christianity have had their fingers burned with one or another messianic or millenarian movement; there are good reasons for speaking of revelatory events only in the past tense. Yet the reasons may be more compelling for seeing our own century as fully part of the continuing unfinished epic of the relationship between Israel and its God, and between the Eternal and those Gentiles who worship Him. The Holocaust and the rebirth of a Jewish state in the Land of Promise are noteworthy not because of the horror of the one and the novelty of the other. They compel attention because they are events in the continuing history of that very people who are the protagonists in as well as the authors of the Scriptures held sacred by both Jews and Christians. This is the ground for finding these to be reorienting events which call both the church and the Jewish people to reinterpret their traditions and come to new self-understanding in the present.

It is difficult to know what to say about a volume which so forcefully opens issues of such vast import. The issues have been raised by others on the

basis of their own reflections on the Holocaust, but the Symposium of 1974 helped sharpen awareness that within our life-time there have come to pass events which we dare not ignore. The merit of this book is to make it possible for many more to enter the disturbing conversation of which that symposium was part. Since at issue is the viability of faith in the God of the Covenant, one might say it is a matter of life and death for both Judaism and Christianity, and possibly also for humanity.