

# MISHKAN

A THEOLOGICAL FORUM ON JEWISH EVANGELISM

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Jerusalem



# MISHKAN

**A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People**

**"LAW AND COVENANT"**

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**United Christian Council in Israel · Jerusalem**

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# Editorial

My fellow-editors and I have been greatly encouraged by international response to the first three issues of MISHKAN. Our goal is to promote biblical, theological and historical thinking in all matters relating to the claims of the Gospel upon Israel. Certain areas require thorough re-evaluation and no small measure of correction: unethical practices, theological deviations and historical errors have sometimes tended to become catalysts for trends unworthy of the Gospel. Many questions which have been left unanswered for two millennia now demand immediate investigation.

MISHKAN enters the forum as a contestant. There is no ambivalence as to its editors' commitment to Jewish evangelism, but this does not mean that we are prepared to defend all past or present assumptions nor condone all such practices. Quite to the contrary – we are critical of much which is often associated with Jewish evangelism. We wish to examine – and invite our writers and readers to examine with us – the basic foundations of all so far assumed to be true. Should we be found in error, we are determined to correct ourselves. We want our thinking and our preaching to be true both to God's written revelation and to the life situation with in which our Gospel is addressed. We dare not do anything against the truth.

In this issue Roy Kearsley and Ole Christian Kvarme lead us into a discussion of the roles of law, covenant and grace. Needless to say, these are no mere incidentals, certainly not in relation to Jewish evangelism. Does faith in Christ imply discontinuity with a continued Jewish existence? If so, how can such a faith not be construed as discontinuous with God's promises and purposes for Israel? In other words, may we continue to insist upon continuity between the Old Testament and the New? If discontinuity with a continued Jewish national existence is not implied, how do Jews in Christ remain Jews? What relation should they now bear to the Mosaic covenant? Indeed, if the faith of Christ is continuous with the faith of Israel, what relation ought Gentile Christians maintain to the Mosaic legislation? Kearsley and Kvarme contribute to this discussion respectively by way of systematic and exegetical discussions. Leading on from this subject, Menachem Benhayim sets before us a reality which, in the eyes of some Christians, is still an embarrassment: Israel, having been rejected by God due to her rejection of His Son, should have long ago passed into oblivion. The sheer dynamism of Israel's continued national existence strikes at the heart of this erroneous theological assumption.

We live in an age of theological ambivalence: nothing theological is acceptable so long as it claims to be true. No view is worth considering unless it is hedged by relativising qualifications which are capable of rendering every "yea" a "nay" and every "nay" a {79} "maybe". The Norwegian Mission to Israel's Statement concerning Christian ministry to the Jewish people ("To the Jew First"), published in the present issue, is likely to be considered far too one-sided by many. Nevertheless, it is a mature, coherent document which states the issues in such a way that they are capable of being defined and discussed. The editors very much hope to publish responses which will be no less forthright and equally mature. Evangelism of the Jewish people is a matter which concerns us all too deeply to be buried by incoherent ambivalence or moralistic mumbo jumbo.

By way of reports, Menachem Benhayim brings an up-to-date description of cooperative efforts among evangelicals here in Israel and thus brings our fourth volume to a fitting conclusion. Such

examples are both an encouragement to us all and an exhortation to continue walking in a manner pleasing to Messiah who has called us into His service.

The editors of MISHKAN were chosen so as to be representative of the heterogeneous nature of the Christian Church: a Norwegian Lutheran, a Scottish Presbyterian working with an Anglican society, and an Israeli Jewish Free Churchman. Working together has proven to be as rewarding and as enjoyable as any educational process could ever hope to be. Ours is not a fellowship of theological ambivalence; we are each firmly committed to respective theological views, many of which conflict with those of our fellow editors. But we are equally determined to learn from each other and thus maintain a tangible visible expression of the unity of the body of Christ and of our fellowship in the Gospel, particularly as it relates to Israel.

Yours for Christ and for Israel,

*Baruch Maoz*

# {1} Paul, The Law and Covenant

*Statement by R. Kearsley*

Dr. Roy Kearsley is professor of Systematic Theology at Glasgow Bible Training Institute. Dr. Kearsley received his B.D. in London and his Ph.D. in Glasgow. He served for seven years in leadership training in Ghana and has been teaching for seven years at the GBTI. Dr. Kearsley is married and has two children.

The main subject of this article concerns Paul's theology of law as discussed in recent European and American literature. The aim here is to identify the chief tensions in this present debate on the Pauline doctrine of law, to examine some of the relevant passages, and to work towards relieving some of these tensions. Finally, the question of distinctions within the law will be considered as well as the influence of covenant on our subject.

## Paul and the problem of Law

J. Fischer is right to remind us that the Greek *nomos* in Paul both translates the Hebrew *Torah* and retains its dual sense of "the whole content of revelation" and the narrow sense of "commandments".<sup>1</sup> Many of the contradictions alleged by H. Raisanen to be present in Paul<sup>2</sup> can be resolved if the above hermeneutical principle will be followed. Paul's use of *nomos*, which includes the idea or the nuance of "Mosaic economy", is also of great help in maintaining perspective when properly identified.

A particular source of tension among scholars is the question of whether or not Paul envisaged some kind of radical break with the law in the work of Christ. The most celebrated advocate on the positive side is E.P. Sanders, who considers that the starting point for all Paul's thinking is the radical discontinuity between Paul's experience as a Jew and his experience of Christ. For Paul, salvation is entirely through faith in Christ, and everything belonging to Judaism, including the law, has been rendered superfluous. It is the law itself, not its legalistic abuse, which is swept away.<sup>3</sup> Sanders is out to present a positive reappraisal of first-century Judaism and to pinpoint what he thinks is the purely experiential nature of Paul's faith.

Some evangelical scholars have been convinced by Sanders' approach: Douglas J. Moo has sought to emphasize the newness of God's act in Christ and to stress that the Law/Gospel antithesis is "founded on the objective, historical contrast between the old age and the new."<sup>4</sup> *Nomos* for Moo, then, can sometimes indicate the "commanding aspect of the Mosaic economy, or the Mosaic economy conceived of as consisting most basically in commandments . . ."<sup>5</sup> This economy was a

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<sup>1</sup> J. Fischer, "Paul in his Jewish Context", *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LVII No. 3, (July 1985) pp. 211-236, esp. pp. 215, 225. See also p. 215

<sup>2</sup> H. Raisanen, "Paul's Theological Difficulties with the Law" in E. A. Livingstone, *Studia Biblica*, 1978, III, pp. 301-320.

<sup>3</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism, A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, London, SCM, 1977, pp. 550-552.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "'Law', 'Works of the Law' and Legalism in Paul", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 45 (1983) pp. 73-100 (p. 100).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

dispensation characterized by law and *supplementary* to the promise first found in Abraham and then fulfilled in Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Moo is particularly concerned about views which soften Paul's negative stance towards the law and thereby damage the vital newness of the Christian era. From his perspective, these views err in explaining away Paul's negativism as a reaction merely to the *abuse* of the law (i.e. to salvation-legalism or works-righteousness).<sup>7</sup> In spite of Sanders' and Moo's {2} arguments, the position they oppose is far from defeat: When we come to a survey of key Pauline passages allegedly showing the decisive demise of the law, it becomes obvious that Paul's voice is not so trenchant after all. What is more, Fischer points to 1 Esdras 8:81 ff; Baruch 4:12; 2 Maccabees 7:9 and even Josephus (Ant. 13:257ff) for evidences of an "acting legalism" or "works-righteousness" stream of thought in contemporary Judaism.<sup>8</sup> These examples are at least as convincing as Sanders' citations, revealing a consciousness in Jewish thought of salvation through sheer mercy.<sup>9</sup>

Let us examine the two basic approaches to this tension. One position emphasizes Paul's complete break with the law, basing it on a desire either to underline the radical character of Paul's experience of Christ, or to do justice to the decisive denouement in salvation-history marked by the Christian era. Both interests are fully Pauline and indispensable to a Christian understanding of grace. However, these approaches are in danger of treating the Mosaic era as a mere parenthesis, or of placing Christianity and Judaism on a spiritual par. The other approach quite rightly senses the danger to the continuity of God's revelation and in particular His binding moral claims upon man. It identifies *abuse* or *legalism* as the target of abrogation in Paul's theology and finds in the Christian era only an enlargement and fulfillment of the law, and of the promise which characterizes the Old Testament. If so, what should be made of the Galatian letter and the apparent obsolescence and temporary or even supplementary nature of the law itself?

A proper understanding of Paul's concept of law requires us to do justice to the motivations standing behind each of these positions. We shall attempt to clarify these areas of tension between the two positions, and then seek to ease or resolve that tension. This is certainly an ambitious task. First of all, it is necessary to review the key texts.

## Key Texts

Paul's references to law are prolific and the reader is directed to the various authors cited for a more comprehensive treatment. I have confined myself to five main passages; I have chosen Romans as a starting point since it represents not only Paul's mature description of the law but also his comprehensive description of the Gospel.

## Romans 3:21

Romans 3:21 concludes with Paul's uncompromising analysis of human sinfulness:

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7, n. 53.

<sup>7</sup> A fine and very thorough example of this is C. T. Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law*, Chicago, Scholars Press 1981, (note for e.g. pp. 92-3).

<sup>8</sup> Fischer *op. cit.*, pp. 216-7

<sup>9</sup> Sanders, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-95

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it ...*

The RSV rendering here lends support to the contention of both Cranfield<sup>10</sup> and Kertelge<sup>11</sup> that within this one verse *nomos* (law) is used in two different senses, namely – law-keeping or works-righteousness, and the Torah or Old Testament law-sections (perhaps even the Old Testament considered as a legally cast document). The problem with this view is that it does not do justice to the Torah itself, almost as if a Torah *of works-righteousness* had been tolerated by God up to that point, but was at last cancelled {3} out by the coming of Christ. Christ’s gift of faith-righteousness, it is argued, was borne witness to by the Old Testament Torah in only a secondary fashion. C. T. Rhyne attempts to solve this problem by taking both instances of *nomos* to refer to the Old Testament revelation viewed from different perspectives – the first as command, the second as witness.<sup>12</sup> The righteousness of God is manifested apart from the remorseless demand of the Old Testament law upon the individual, but in fulfillment of the element of promise always present within the selfsame Old Testament demands. In this way Rhyne avoids disparate uses of *nomos* in one verse and does justice to the “but now”. There always was an intended element of demand in the Old Testament revelation, though it was never intended to be a “works-righteousness” way of salvation. There always was an element of grace, but it was subservient to the prophesied coming righteousness. I would add that this newly manifested righteousness is nevertheless a whole new age of fulfillment inaugurated by the coming of Christ and sealed by the events of his life, death and resurrection. This is the significance of the term “but now”.

## Romans 7

Raisanen characteristically dismisses Romans 7 as a reflection of Paul’s own psychological experiences from which the apostle unwisely elaborates a theology of law.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the reverse seems to be the correct order. A particular theology of law produces a particular religious experience, as Luther was to discover in the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Paul begins the chapter by highlighting our release from the tyranny of the law as an oppressive agency due to our sin. Cranfield is quite right, on the strength of Paul’s approval of that same law in vv. 14 and 25, to infer that Paul is speaking of the law as a condemning and enslaving power.<sup>15</sup> Christ’s death for us (chapter 5) and our death in Him (chapter 6) alter this law’s relationship to us decisively. It matters not whether chapter 7 is to be interpreted as describing the unconverted Jew or Gentile, the Christian, or even the individual neutrally viewed; there can be no doubt that Paul derives his various descriptions of that person’s inner state from his own theology of Christ’s death vis-à-vis both law and penalty. What then is the theology that pervades Romans 7? It consists of two things:

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<sup>10</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, “St. Paul and the Law”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (1964) pp. 43-68 (p. 55).

<sup>11</sup> Karl Kertelge, “Gesetz und Freiheit im Galterbrief”, *New Testament Studies*, 36, (1984) pp. 382-394 (p. 383)

<sup>12</sup> C. T. Rhyne, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>13</sup> Raisanen, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-1. As so often, Raisanen echoes Sanders.

<sup>14</sup> . For an understanding of Luther and the unavoidable conclusion that Luther is truly a disciple of Paul in the matter of the law, See P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1979, G. Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to his Thought*, London, Collins, 1970, G. O. Ford, “Law and Gospel in Luther’s Hermeneutic”, *Interpretation*, 37, No. 3 (1983), pp. 240-252; D. J. Moo, *op. cit.*, 98-99. It is not helpful, in my view, to dismiss European work on the subject of the law as a parochial concern with the Western church’s disputes with no relevance for modern Jewish Christianity, any more than the Western churches should discard the work of the great fathers of Eastern Christendom.

<sup>15</sup> Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 56.



first, that the Torah had a demoralizing and destructive effect upon the sinner (vv. 5,6,9-11, 13) entirely because of the weakening power of sin (vv. 8, 9,11, 13, 17, 18 etc.).

{4} There is more in view here than moral successes and failures. According to Rom. 8:1 this relationship of inadequacy before an implacable law spells condemnation. In other words, the application of the sinner to the unremitting task of perfect law-keeping not only exhausts but also leads to ruin. It is, after all, a doomed salvation-legalism which Paul is decrying, whether espoused by pre-Christians or those who are already Christians. We cannot go into the complex and extensive issue of what kind of person is the subject of the “I” in Romans 7, but we may fairly conclude that the law, abrogated and dispensed with, must meet the above description. This “law” can therefore only be interpreted as an oppressive force, twisted and misconstrued by the sinner. It is different from the law as given by God which in itself is “good”; only its special and strained relationship to people weakened and condemned by sin causes this perversion. Romans 7 deals with the sinner’s relationship to the law inasmuch as it has bearing upon his avoidance of condemnation and his acceptance by God. The consigning of the law to the past must be read in this light. The law *in itself* remains good, valid and approved.

*Secondly*, the transformation of the individual’s relationship to the law is effected by a new and revolutionary phase of “salvation-history” (i.e., the coming of Christ, His incarnation and death – Rom. 8:3). A new kind of righteousness begins because of the new era of Christ. Once again, as in Rom. 3:21, this does not mean the end of a “works-righteousness” era, for there never was such an era even in the Mosaic economy. Nor does it mean that the Old Testament, which points to God’s demands upon us, is completely abrogated. It merely means that the *promise* has come to fruition. For Christians, salvation by grace centres exclusively upon Christ who had been but *dimly* anticipated in Old Testament times.

As a corollary to this historical consciousness, it is worth mentioning that vv. 8, 9 suggest that Paul is not concentrating upon the psychological effects of the law only but speaking of the coming of the Mosaic era:<sup>16</sup>

*Apart from the law (nomos) sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law (nomos). But when the commandment (entole) came, sin lived and I died.*

{5} This striking phrase (literally “in the decisive coming of the commandment”) can easily be interpreted as referring to the giving of the Torah in its commanding aspect. Such a reading is even more likely if the opening words of Romans 7 indicate that the passage is addressed to a Jewish group within the Roman Church, a possibility enhanced by the presence of chapter 2 in this letter.<sup>17</sup>

All in all, while Paul gives recognition to the Torah’s power both to provoke disobedience and to produce condemnation (though the latter case doesn’t apply to someone in Christ), he also announces a radical break with the law both as it concerns the individual believer and the redemptive economy. As with Rom. 3:21 the preparatory era of the Torah has ended, and the fulfillment era of Christ has come. Romans 8:4ff makes it clear that the just demands which lie at the heart of the Torah also find fulfillment (*pleroo*) in the individual through Christ’s work. In

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<sup>16</sup> Moo, *op. cit.*, p. 82., n. 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81



such texts as these Calvin found his justification for the continuing “third use” of the law by which the commanding aspect of the Torah still functions for life and holiness in the believer.<sup>18</sup>

## Romans 10:4

The verse reads: “For Christ is the end (*telos*) of the law (*nomos*), that everyone who has faith may be justified”. Much turns on the interpretation of the word *telos*.

Probably no text of Paul has provoked more sharply opposed views on the law than has this one. On the whole, the lines of opposition drawn up previously apply here as well, though surprising alliances appear. Sanders is predictably clear:

*As far as salvation goes, Christ has put an end to the law and provides a different righteousness from that provided by Torah obedience (Rom. 10:2-4)... The law is good, even doing the law is good, but salvation is only by Christ; therefore the entire system represented by the law is worthless for salvation.*<sup>19</sup>

Moo is more restrained but, like Sanders, interprets *telos* as meaning termination, so that the verses like Rom. 10:4,

*are best explained as having reference to the Mosaic law, as usual in Paul; and Paul is insistent that he himself, though not under the law, is nevertheless “in-lawed to Christ” (ennomos Christou, 1 Cor. 9:20-21)...*<sup>20</sup>

Moo believes that for Paul the entire Mosaic law-system was abolished and replaced by the law of Christ. This is still a radical viewpoint and difficult to reconcile with the claim of Jesus that He fulfilled the law and the prophets.

To Raisanen, also, it is clear from the “polemic context (both v. 3 and v. 5), as well as the parallel passage in 2 Cor. 3... ”<sup>21</sup> that *telos* means “termination”. He dismisses, perhaps too lightly, the positive attitude of Paul to the law reflected only a few verses earlier (9:31) and simply puts the contradiction down to Paul’s vagaries.<sup>22</sup> This approach is interesting, but its abandonment of any rational justification for such an interpretation of *telos* does not {6} commend itself. H. Hubner claims that Rom. 10:4 refers to the “end of the law concerning fleshly humanity” corresponding to “end of the perverting of the law through sin and flesh.”<sup>23</sup> This position interprets *telos* as meaning termination whilst preserving the coherence of Paul’s argument as a whole. It is a weak suggestion in that it is a sudden deviation from Paul’s use of *nomos* in the passage and this sense would not have been obvious to his readers.

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<sup>18</sup> J. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Editor, J. T. McNeil, Translator, F. L. Battles) Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1975, Book 2, Chapter 7, Section 2.

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, *op. cit.*, p. 550

<sup>20</sup> Moo, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Raisanen, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 306 and 312-4

<sup>23</sup> Hans Hubner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus, Ein Beitrag zum Werden der paulinischen Theologie*, Gottingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978, p. 129. I understand this work is now available in English.

It seems that we must fall back upon C. E. B. Cranfield's interpretation, namely that *telos* means not "termination" but "goal".<sup>24</sup> The array of texts which Cranfield submits to prove that Paul sees Christ as the goal of the law is far weightier than Raisanen's observation that *telos* in 2 Cor. 3 means termination;<sup>25</sup> in that passage *telos* does not actually refer to the law itself. Cranfield argues that Christ is the "goal" of the law in the sense that the law is directed to and bears witness of Him in its promises, moral demands and ceremonies, in its revelation of human sinfulness and provision of a forensic framework for Christ's saving work. This view has the advantage of doing justice to the full meaning of Torah without masking its commanding aspect.

According to this view, Paul is highlighting the failure of some Jews to discern in the Torah a witness to Christ, faith in whom alone brings righteousness and acceptance. Instead of acknowledging the righteousness which comes through faith, they remain preoccupied with their own works-righteousness. They do not realize that the main purpose of the Torah, whose regulations they so passionately observe, was intended to point them away from delusions of self-adequacy to Christ, their only true hope of acceptance.

Kaiser<sup>26</sup> and Fischer<sup>27</sup> both follow Cranfield's view of *telos*. So also do W. S. Campbell<sup>28</sup> and C. T. Rhyne.<sup>29</sup> The latter even sees in v. 5 a reference to Christ himself<sup>30</sup> ("the man who practices the righteousness based on the law shall live by it").

Romans 10:4, then, is not dealing with some radical jettisoning of the Torah in consequence of the Gospel. Yet we cannot overlook that even here there is a historical dimension: the Torah is witness, but Christ is the goal. The sentiment of Rom. 3:21 is present, as Cranfield is quick to point out<sup>31</sup> Paul remains consistent. The coming of Christ has closed the witness-era and opened the goal-era or fulfillment-era. For this reason there may be something in Campbell's theory that v. 5 refers to Christ as the one who fulfils the dictum of Lev. 18:5. Once again we are able both to keep intact the view that Paul's theology of law counteracts legalistic *abuse* of the law, and to preserve the view that he is nevertheless drawing a vertical line through redemptive history to delineate the Torah-era from the Christ-era.

## II Corinthians 3

In this passage which compares Paul's ministry to Moses' ministry, it is often assumed that Paul is describing the abolition of the Torah.<sup>32</sup> Against this view Cranfield again leads the way. He finds in v. 11 that it is not the Torah promulgated by Moses which "faded away" (*katargeo*) but the

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<sup>24</sup> Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-53.

<sup>25</sup> Raisanen, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>26</sup> W. C. Kaiser, "The Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law: Moses, Jesus and Paul", in G. F. Hawthorne (Ed.), *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation. Studies in Honour of M. C. Tenny*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 176-191, (pp. 177-8).

<sup>27</sup> Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>28</sup> W. S. Campbell, "Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4", in E. A. Livingstone (Ed.) *Studia Biblica* 1978, 111, pp. 73-81.

<sup>29</sup> C. T. Rhyne, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-6, 112-3. 30.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

<sup>31</sup> Cranfeild, *op. cit.*, p. 50

<sup>32</sup> For some authorities inclined this way see C. T. Rhyne, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9, 128, n. 16.

ministry of Moses which belonged to the period of expectation.<sup>33</sup> {7} Paul's ministry belongs to the period of fulfillment and accordingly radiates greater splendor. Kaiser supports this position, emphasizing verse 6: "a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life." Kaiser sees here a parallel to Rom. 2:29, contrasting circumcision in the flesh and circumcision of the heart.<sup>34</sup> I find these views to be substantially correct, and accordingly conclude that once again we find Paul rejecting a powerless legalism in favor of a faith in Christ which gives rise to Spirit-empowered obedience. This faith holds fast to the concept of a totally new historical phase of fulfillment, in contrast to the Mosaic ministry of expectation. This is not a rejection of the idea of command in the Torah but the recognition that an economy or administration (even a covenant)<sup>35</sup> has, for all its comparative splendor, passed away.

### Galatians 3 – 4

Traditionally the polemic of Paul in Galatians has been taken as an attack on the salvation-legalism rooted in some quarters of first-century Judaism and being imported to the predominantly Gentile church of Galatia by a Judaizing sect of Jewish Christians. Modern research has raised difficulties for this view, however, and two of these in particular may be mentioned. The first is the abovementioned case by Sanders, that it was not at all a characteristic of Judaism to expect salvation on the basis of meritorious works. We have seen already that some strains in contemporaneous Jewish literature do indeed lend themselves to such a philosophy, and as a result we must point out that some scholars remain unconvinced by Sanders' argument on this score. In a critical review of Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* G. B. Caird argues that even given Sanders' sensitive presentation, the powerful legalism of Palestinian Judaism was far removed from the Christian concept of a mercy embracing both Jews and Gentiles. A. J. Saldarini even denies the priority of covenant in Tannaitic literature: "Halaka... is itself central and primary"<sup>36</sup>

Enough has been said to at least steady the shaken traditional pillar concerning the purpose of the Galatian epistle.<sup>37</sup> Yet Sanders' contention that Paul is very radically contrasting the way of Christ with the system of Judaism (i.e. "law") seems to be underlined by the negative features used to describe the law ("cursed" – v. 10, "no man justified" – v. 11, "came afterward" – v. 17, "confined under law" – v. 23). Also one must carefully weigh his suggestion that "law" denotes a merely temporary phase or period to be left behind as quickly as possible. There is clearly an historical dimension here involving the same definitive break described in passages already considered.

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<sup>33</sup> Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 58

<sup>34</sup> W. C. Kaiser, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>35</sup> Here at least we part company with Cranfield. See section on covenant, below

<sup>36</sup> A. J. Saldarini in a review of Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 98 (1979) pp. 299-303 (p. 300).

<sup>37</sup> A fresh but exaggerated attempt to uphold a "continuum" of the law between the testaments is that of D. P. Fuller who sees in "Galatianism" no more than "a faulty view of sanctification", *Gospel and Law, Contrast or Continuum. The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*, Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans, 1980. It seems that Fuller has not done justice to the gravity of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The apostle is certainly relating the law to the very *essence* of salvation and deliverance from curse, the Gospel itself.

I want to suggest that Paul's attitude, though more passionate in the Galatian letter, is not substantially different from later texts such as Romans. Paul insists in Rom. 3:21 that righteousness came apart from the law, but also that the same law functioned as a *protevangelium* to Christ who is its fulfillment. That is how he presents it in Galatians as well. Here the law cannot save (it was impossible for a law to be given which could realize that end *because of human sinfulness and weakness* (as Paul states in Gal. 3:21).

I agree with Moo that the *impotence of the sinner in his relation to law* is what Paul has in mind here.<sup>38</sup> This is implied in Gal. 3:10 (the curse as a penalty for the moral shortfall and {8} the crushing requirement that *all* the works of the law be fulfilled) and in Gal. 3:13 (with its notion of ransom from the penalty of that failure). To this we may add that Gal. 3:19 attributes the law's arrival to the chronic human condition of transgressing (Gal. 3:22); the condition of being under the law is also characterized as slavery (Gal. 4:21-25).

As in Rom. 3:21, however, this same law bears witness to the righteousness of God making its appearance in Christ. The law is a custodian guiding us towards the coming of Christ. The law is not opposed to promise ("opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not!" – Gal. 3:21) but *conducts* us to the promise (Gal. 3:24-27, 29).

A picture is emerging which is not dissimilar to that described in Romans 7. Law is introduced to the sinner during the Mosaic epoch and, due to its predominantly commanding aspect, it both provokes and condemns with a curse. The decisive factor in lifting the curse (though not in neutralizing its provoking function nor in denying its value as a signpost towards Christ) is the work of Christ, inaugurating a new age of fulfillment. This alone is where the radical break comes. The unfolding of the new phase dissolves the law's function as custodian, as restrainer, as a holding operation awaiting the fulfillment towards which it strained. Legalism or works-righteousness is now not only inappropriate (as it always was) but also *dated* and left behind by the new shift in God's economy.

We are brought at last by this circuitous route to the role of covenant in the continuous/discontinuous character of law. First, however, something must briefly be said about distinctions within varying concepts of law.

## Continuity and Discontinuity in the Law

It is now almost an unassailable canon in some quarters that no such convention as a distinction between moral, ceremonial, civil and ritual law may be allowed. It is argued that such a distinction was nowhere recognized in Judaism nor expounded by Jesus or Paul.<sup>39</sup> This may be true but it seems irrelevant. So far as Judaism was concerned the whole thrust of New Testament teaching (from the tearing of the temple curtain to the central figure of Christ as bearer of the new Torah) underlined a new order, a disruption, a sword whose revolutionary aspects were rightly sensed both by Paul's Jewish opponents and the modern E. P. Sanders alike.

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<sup>38</sup> Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 85. Moo assembles some weighty authorities including R. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1976, p. 119.

More than this – the refusal to make such distinctions in the Torah leads to destinations unwanted by many scholars. Kaiser has stated this pointedly:

*... if the law is a monolithic unity, and if we can establish from Hebrews, Eph. (2:15) and Col. (2:14-15) that part of the law, namely the ceremonial, has been terminated by Christ's atoning death and resurrection, then obviously the whole law has been terminated ...*<sup>40</sup>

Kaiser argues passionately for a special priority and distinction for the moral law particularly as it conforms to the twin commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbor.<sup>41</sup> Here is the prior and abiding core of Torah, and in Mark 12:33 Jesus {9} commends the lawyer for recognizing that this core completely outweighs all offerings and sacrifices. Kaiser argues that here and in Matt. 9:13,12:7, Jesus agrees with the prophets that Deut. 1-11 is the weightier part of the law.

Paul never denigrates concrete standards of behavior which might resemble the Decalogue or the moral instructions of Jesus. Indeed these behavioral standards in relation to one's neighbor constitute the distinctive life of the Christian (e.g. Gal. 5:22, 23; Ephesians 5, etc.). But Paul is definitely cool towards ceremonial ordinances. For one thing, as the Jerusalem Council illustrates, the whole Mosaic system was not universal (in that it was not placed upon the Gentiles). This alone marks a distinction within the Torah. But more specifically the efficacy of physical circumcision is questioned in Gal. 5:1-6,6:15. Here it is not just a case of circumcision being a matter of indifference, as Sanders suggests,<sup>42</sup> but a case of negating its value. Although Paul elsewhere expects or allows circumcision to be continued by Jews (1 Cor. 7:17-19) he also adds the telling contrast – “neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but *keeping the commandments of God.*” Similarly in Romans 14 Paul recognizes the submissive spirit with which some keep food laws or special days; there he strictly forbids any sanctions or self-righteousness in regard to these things. Nevertheless the one with scruples is the one “weak in faith” (Rom. 14:1, 2), and these foods Paul does in fact deem clean (Rom. 14:14) as did Jesus (Mk. 7:18,19). He also declares that the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit (Rom. 14:17 – thus excluding foods from the category of righteousness-fulfillment). Heb. 9:6-10 and Eph. 2:11-14, though not without their points of obscurity, point to the abolition of laws and ordinances which hitherto have divided Jew and Gentile. *Some* distinction within the Torah is thus implied. Colossians 2:16, 17 equally sets aside the binding character of certain laws established by God's express command to be foreshadows of Christ. Indeed, the whole book of Hebrews is full of abrogation, but a shining clarity about the whole issue is most strikingly achieved in Heb. 9:6-10.

The New Testament does not expound an explicit thesis on the Trinity but Trinitarian assumptions pervade its message. The same may be said of the traditional and still valid distinction between ceremonial and moral law. Paul was plainly working with this distinction when he considered that, “when Gentiles who have not the law (*nomos*) do what the law requires ... they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears witness and their

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<sup>40</sup> Kaiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-80.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>42</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, pp. 100-1.

conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them...” (Rom. 2:14, 15).<sup>43</sup> These closing words, I suggest, have the Gentiles in mind – non-Christian Gentiles who fulfill in some measure not the ceremonial law but features of the Torah’s behavioral standards, and do so because of their constitutional nature as moral creatures. This is what makes the moral law different from other laws in the Torah. To this distinction the nature of the other Torah laws bear testimony. The requirements of moral law, however much misconstrued by the debased human mind, are written into the human conscience and are never totally erased. These laws are generally speaking pre-Mosaic but, since reinforced through Christ, also post-Mosaic in nature. This now brings us to the role of covenant.

## {10} Christ, the Law and Covenant

A key text is Matt. 11:28-29:

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Jesus has just said that all things have been given to Him. Grace and forgiveness will now only be mediated through *Him*, and by implication no longer through the Mosaic ceremonial system. But more than that, the law that remains (whatever may be clearly distinguished from the mediatorial ceremonies) will now be heard through Him. He will take away from the backs of the common people their unbearable legal burden similar to the ungainly and heavy pack upon the back of a camel. There will still be a “yoke” (common parlance for Torah) yet not a burdensome one, because it is based on saving knowledge (v. 2), is learnt from a human mediator familiar with temptation and is given in gentleness and mildness. Jesus is saying that there is a newness of law that goes with newness of covenant. Here is a new institution of law commensurate with His words “this cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Matt. 26:28). If we search for the new Torah of Jesus we shall find no ceremonial elements in it except for baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It is a law which underlines His own life of love to God and to men, a law written upon the inner recesses of the heart.

It is this inner obedience and conformity to God’s own character as displayed in Christ which characterizes the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; Ezk. 11:19; 36:26). Under the old covenant an external sign, with continuing external ordinances, pointed towards an internalization, a circumcision of the heart. Deuteronomy 10:16 begins with a command: “circumcise your hearts...” but, as if to anticipate the purely preparatory and incomplete nature of the covenant, finishes with a promise: “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” God’s old covenant contains the seeds of a new covenant, just as the old law contains the seeds and building material of Christ’s new, rigorously inward standards for the liberated. The old covenant was a school of redemption in which those called to religious privilege were supposed to discover circumcision of heart. *Pace* Sanders, covenantal Nomism was not so much about “staying in’ the

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<sup>43</sup> I’m well aware that some see here a reference to Christian Gentiles. Even this interpretation, however, would not demolish our case since it could not be ceremonial laws that are in mind. Note: Since the footnote number is missing in the original text, we have tentatively inserted it at this point.

covenant, but “going on” in the covenant to inward obedience.<sup>44</sup> Only a “remnant”, according to Paul, found the way of faith for inward obedience, but with the coming of Christ a new covenant, which *began* with inward circumcision through faith, was instituted through the power of Christ’s saving death and resurrection. In Christ’s hands the moral content of inward circumcision was given new sharpness and permanence.

{11} This very brief sketch indicates the multifaceted functions of the Torah as implied by the life and work of Christ. The ceremonies, never renewed or intensified by Jesus, fell away on account of their preparatory, auxiliary and anticipatory character. They spoke of an inability to fulfill God’s gracious purposes (cf. Heb. 11:39, 40). That was their function – they were witnesses. A new “fulfillment-covenant” ends their long and worthy function. As we all know, however, practice is not as simple as theology. Although the temple, the heart of the ritual system, was soon to be removed, traditions still prevailed. The apostles went up to the temple, Paul observed a feast day (Acts 20:5-6), and a Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18, cf. 21:24-26), and was regarded as living “in observance of the law” (Acts 21:24) by the elders in Jerusalem. Though these things may be true, it is impossible to hold Fischer’s view that Paul’s life continued as that of a Pharisee, without any change.<sup>45</sup> Did Paul excuse himself to visit a mikveh every time he embraced a Gentile brother in Christ? Could a card-carrying Pharisee sit at the Lord’s communion table and eat with uncircumcised Gentiles when even religious commoners like Peter and Barnabas hesitated over such table fellowship (Gal. 2:11-13)? Sanders is soundly realistic about this, concluding that Paul lived as under the law amongst Jews and as without the law amongst Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:20). He continues:

*If Jewish and Gentile Christians were to eat together, one would have to decide whether to live as a Jew or as a Gentile. Paul might conceivably act one way in Jerusalem and another in Asia Minor and Greece, or one way in the Jewish section of a city and another way in the remainder of it, but even he, artful though he was, could not do both simultaneously.*<sup>46</sup>

Given the choices pressed upon him, Paul finally gave priority to the unity of the Church. It took his experiences in Gentile-orientated missionary work to bring this practical question to the fore. Therefore, his most mature expositions of the law are contained in Romans, Colossians and Ephesians. Whereas no man actually sins by personally observing customs, anything which discriminates or divides in the body of Christ is intolerable and an offence against the new covenant made in Christ’s blood and symbolized by the Lord’s table. These are Paul’s final words on the matter. No barriers to unconditional unity between Jew and Gentile in the Church of Christ are compatible with the new covenant in which there is no longer “Jew or Gentile” so far as spiritual fellowship is concerned. The fellowship of the Church will take priority over every other affiliation of blood, status or sex (Gal. 3:28). The grounds for Paul’s judgment are those of a whole new epoch and age in which law and covenant are re-cast in the hands of Christ. How this principle should be upheld by congregations in Israel or in predominantly Jewish areas is for those involved

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<sup>44</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 422. Though usefully employed, I feel that the idea is taken up a little too uncritically and enthusiastically by G. Wenham in an otherwise helpful article, “Grace and Law in the Old Testament”. in B. N. Kaye and G. J. Wenham, (eds.) *Law, Morality, and the Bible*, Leicester, IVP.

<sup>45</sup> Fischer *op. cit.*, pp. 221-3.

<sup>46</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, p. 177.



to work out, for *they* have to live with the difficulties. But such a praxis of theology has ramifications for fellowship with the rest of us. May God grant humility, courage and loyalty to the new covenant to you in this task. May He grant wisdom in the yet greater task of culturally identifying with your own people without ever betraying the Gospel's newness and without ever denying the redundancy of the "law of ordinances" as it concerns fellowship with God.

# {14} RESPONSE

by R. Steven Notley

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to:

## “Paul, the Law and Covenant”

By nature responsive articles tend to be provocative. The respondent must interact with the material in such a way that readers are challenged to question the views of the author. Sometimes the affinities between the author and the respondent are overshadowed by their points of difference. Let me say from the outset that I appreciated the article by Dr. Kearsley, both for his presentation of relevant Pauline texts and for his bringing to our attention the diverging views of modern New Testament scholarship regarding Paul and the Law. He has provided us with a forum for discussing what has historically been one of the most vexing issues facing the Church and its progression from Judaism. What is the role of Torah in the messianic (Christian) community?

### Faith and Torah

Since the Reformation, Protestant Christianity has developed a sort of tunnel-vision regarding Paul. Thus, the Apostle is read in light of Martin Luther with the primary aim of establishing salvation through faith rather than through works.<sup>1</sup> Thus, both Torah observance and the selling of indulgences are understood to be the products of a “works-righteousness” mentality and therefore incompatible with faith. Within this theological matrix Torah observance and the selling of indulgences generally function as correspondents in juxtaposition to faith. I submit that in identifying Pauline issues with Reformation terminology of the faith-works polemic, Dr. Kearsley has distorted the purpose and meaning of several main texts.

The burning issue in the first generation of Christendom was not the question of faith and works (as per our modern understanding), but instead, what was to be done with the great influx of Gentile believers in the messianic congregations. More to the point – what were to be the legal requirements by which these new Gentile believers would live?<sup>2</sup> Often Paul’s discussion concerning the role of Torah in the life of the believer is in response to those elements within the

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<sup>1</sup> Note Dr. Kearsley’s footnote, No. 14. Note: Since the footnote number is missing in the original text, we have tentatively inserted it at this point.

<sup>2</sup> The question of the legal requirements for Gentile proselytes is not unique to the church. Opinions were varied within Judaism during that period. An important debate regarding the necessity of circumcision and baptism for proselytes is found in TB Yebamoth 46a. The importance for us here is to note that there did not exist unanimity of thought regarding the legal requirements for proselytes. Thus, the first generation of the Church (Acts 15) can be viewed in the larger context of a debate in Jewish thought during the period. The reader is also referred to G. F. Moore “Conversion of Gentiles,” *Judaism: In the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 323-353.

Church which felt that the Gentiles needed to embrace the totality of the Law. George Foot Moore perceptibly {15} notes that “he (Paul) was, in fact, not writing to convince Jews but to keep his Gentile converts from being convinced by Jewish propagandists, who insisted that faith in Christ was not sufficient to salvation apart from the observance of the law.”<sup>3</sup> Care must be taken lest one understand Paul’s statements about Torah apart from this context.

While the Apostle to the Gentiles would surely have expressed vehement opposition to the requirement of Torah observance for Gentile believers, he doubtless would have seen no incompatibility between Gospel belief and Torah observance for his Jewish brothers. Paul’s emphasis that salvation comes solely through faith in Jesus Christ need not be construed as a fracturing in any sense of the relationship between Torah observance and the Jewish people.<sup>4</sup>

The strength of Paul’s argument in Romans lies in his contention that man has *never* found favor in God’s sight through his own merit, but only through faithful trust in God’s mercy. The emphasis of Romans 3:21 is not “a whole new age of fulfillment” in contradistinction to Torah, but rather the revelation that men can enter into a relationship with God outside of the covenantal requirement of Torah observance. Is this not the cause of Peter’s and “the circumcised believers” wonder in Acts 10, that God has bestowed on these uncircumcised Gentiles the gift of the Spirit? Indeed, the importance of this event finds relevance in the proceedings of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). For whom is this revelation pertinent? Within the historical context of the period its significance is primarily for the Gentiles.

Only by so understanding the issues facing Paul can we rightly discern the meaning of the verses following Romans 3:21 “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. *For there is no distinction...*” Between whom is there no distinction? Between Jew and Gentile. All men must come to God by faith, “since indeed God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith, is one” (Rom. 3:30). Torah, the sign which has distinguished God’s people Israel from the nations, can no longer be considered as a mark of covenantal exclusion for those Gentiles who believe in Christ Jesus.

The apostle thus exposes the fallacy in the thinking that Gentiles, who like Abraham (Rom. 4) were never given the Law, should now of necessity embrace it. Paul’s antagonists are not some aberrant group proposing “works-righteousness” in opposition to “faith-righteousness”. Instead, Paul’s use of faith-works is a theological construct to emphasize the salvific impotence of the Law in contrast to the atonement of Christ and this for the purpose of clearly bringing into focus the unbiblical requirement of Torah observance for Gentile believers. If, as his antagonists propose, these uncircumcised believers must embrace the totality of the Law, then Divine favor is granted on the basis of merit rather than of mercy, and Christ’s atonement is of no avail.

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<sup>3</sup> George Foot Moore, *Judaism*, p. 495, note 209.

<sup>4</sup> Thus I cannot agree with Kearsley’s assertion that although *telos* in Rom. 10:4 means “goal” rather than “end,” (Paul) “is nevertheless drawing a vertical line through his redemptive history to delineate the Torah-era from the Christ-era.” The nature of “witness and fulfillment” in the life and work of Christ does not of necessity suggest abrogation of the past or obsolescence of the Law.

## {16} Jesus, Paul and Torah

It is an historical Christian misconception of first century Judaism that there existed a “works-righteousness” mindset in the mainstream of Jewish thought. If such an attitude did exist among Jesus’ contemporaries, why did He not confront it as the unambiguous heresy that it is? Instead, the prevalent problem facing Jesus was religious hypocrisy, a problem by no means unique to Pharisaic Judaism! The perversion of faith lay in reliance upon the faith of the Fathers rather than on personal repentance and faith in God (Matt. 3:9). The Rabbis also addressed this issue and asserted the need for the belief of each generation. *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael* on Exodus 14:15 records a discussion between Shemayah and Avtalyon (1 Century B.C. – they were the teachers of Hillel and Shamai) concerning whose faith was responsible for God’s parting of the Red Sea.

*Shemayah says: (The Lord declared) “The faith with which their father Abraham believed in Me is deserving that I should divide the sea for them.” For it is said: “And he believed in the Lord” (Gen. 15:6)*

*Avtalyon says: (The Lord declared) “The faith with which they believed in Me is deserving that I should divide the sea for them.” For it is said: “And the people believed” (Ex. 4:31)*

The idea of the need for personal faith and trust in God was not foreign to Second Temple Judaism and was not seen to be inconsistent with observance of the legal commandments given by God.

*A single thread, clearly manifest, runs from the time of the earliest Hasmoneans to the last of the Amoraim. The concept of faith in the Lord does not find exhaustive expression in the reception in the recognition of God’s existence... Faith is trust in the existence of Divine Providence. The manifestations of man’s faith are the love and fear of the Lord.<sup>5</sup>*

Torah was viewed as having a pedagogical role, instructing the faithful in the Lord’s ways, how to live in love and fear of Him. The Midrash on Genesis 1:1 in fact calls Torah “pedagogue” and presents a personification of Torah not dissimilar to the presentation of Wisdom in Proverbs (Prov. 1:20-33; 8:131 – in which one of the roles attributed to Torah is that of a tutor). Even in the beginning of creation, Torah is present giving definition to the will of God in the design of creation.

*The Torah declares: I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He. In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers of the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world...<sup>6</sup>*

Although the Torah held an exalted position in Jewish thought, we lack evidence that the “works-righteousness” attitude which Kearsley suggests, existed in the first century of the Christian era. The difference in emphasis given to the Law and to faith in the teaching of Jesus and Paul is a result of differing historical contexts. The earthly ministry of Jesus was not primarily directed at

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<sup>5</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1979), p. 36/

<sup>6</sup> *Genesis Rabbah*, Transl. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman (New York: The Soncino Press, 1983), Vol. 1, p. 1

Gentiles, {17} and so the accompanying questions regarding their relationship to the Law did not arise at that time. When matters of the Law are mentioned in Jesus' teaching, it is for the purpose of interpreting them in much the same manner that His contemporaries were involved in interpretation.

We must not assume that the opposition to Jesus in didactic encounters reflects a unique occurrence. Anyone who has read Rabbinic literature which reflects the period is aware of the ongoing debates concerning interpretation of legal matters. Likewise, Jesus' dissenting interpretation from a particular opponent does not suggest a unilateral declaration of abrogation of the Torah.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Jesus admonished His followers not only to keep the Written Law (Matt. 5:17-20) but the Oral Law (Matt. 23:1-3) as it occurs in the teaching of the Pharisees. Nowhere in the teaching of Jesus do we find the expression of an incompatibility between Torah observance and faith.

If Kearsley is accurate in his portrayal of Paul, then the apostle clearly deviated from the teachings of Jesus. No doubt many would subscribe to such a view. However, this respondent is of the opinion that the teachings of Jesus and Paul, while no doubt distinctive, provided a continuity of thought which was adapted to meet two very different situations.

## Paul and Torah

Dr. Kearsley's treatment of the Pauline texts does not take sufficient account of the Gentile-Christian problem in understanding Paul's view of the Law and faith. Paul's comments regarding Torah, instead, are understood to be intended for Jew and Gentile alike. Distinction suggests inequality in the modern mind, but we must refrain from imposing our frame of reference on the meaning of Paul's teaching. The complexities caused by such an ambivalent approach become apparent rather quickly.

Can the apostle who proposes, as many suggest, the abrogation of the Law and valuelessness of circumcision be the same Paul who went to the Temple to be purified in demonstration that he was innocent of instructing the Jews "not to circumcise their children or observe the customs"(Acts 21:25)? Unless attention is paid to the background issues facing Paul, a clear contradiction emerges. Kearsley notes this problem and chooses instead Paul's "mature" theology which he finds in the apostle's letters to the Romans, Colossians and Ephesians. He admits that the apostles went up to the temple, that Paul observed a Nazirite vow and a feast day (Acts 18:18; 20:5-6) and was regarded as living in observance of the law by the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 21:24-26)

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<sup>7</sup> Kearsley does not accurately convey Jesus' understanding of the "great commandment" (Mk. 12:28-34; Matt. 22:34-40) when he suggests a distinction in the Law for the purpose of canceling the ritual and ceremonial portions. First, the reader should be aware that Luke (10:25-28) has a more complete account of the incident than do the other Gospels. Thus, note the absence of a parallel to Mk. 12:32-34. We find a similar account in TB Shabbat 31a which sheds light on the meaning of the New Testament encounter. In the Rabbinical event a foreigner comes to Hillel desiring to convert, on the condition that Hillel can teach him the whole of the Torah while he stands on one foot. Unlike Shammai who repels the supplicant, Hillel receives the foreigner and teaches him, "What you do not like to have done to you do not do to your fellow. This is the whole of the Law; the rest is the explanation of it. Go, learn it." In the same measure that we cannot assume that Hillel is teaching the obsolescence of the remaining *mitzvot*, we cannot suggest that Jesus is creating a distinction in the Law for the purpose of canceling its ceremonial or ritual aspects. The meaning of both the Rabbinic and Lukan accounts is to establish precepts which provide the basis for the remaining commandments.

Nevertheless, the author excuses these inconsistencies, assuming that these events do not reflect the totality of Paul's life. We can only remark that the declaration by the elders in Jerusalem to the effect that Paul was living in observance of the law occurred after his missionary journeys.

Other scholars have tried to reconcile this conflict by accusing Luke of misrepresenting Paul by devising a chronology which would ease the tensions, or even by accusing the apostle of succumbing to the pressure of his peers. Few of these attempts do justice either to the man or his teaching. The unique nature of Paul's mission may have created situations in which legal observance was not feasible. This does not suggest, however, that Paul took an indifferent view of the Torah or his observance of it as a Jew. By our ambivalence to the issues facing Paul, we have created a dilemma which need not exist.

## {18} Continuity and Torah

In focusing on the categorical obsolescence of the Law, Kearsley encounters the traditional dilemma of Christian apologetics: how do we at the minimum maintain the need to adhere to the moral precepts of the Law? And what is to be done with those parts of the Law which were taught and kept by Jesus and Paul? The author duly notes that Christian scholarship is in disagreement over the arbitrary distinctions between moral, ceremonial, civil and ritual law. I use the adjective "arbitrary" because the various distinctions are often fraught with subjectivity. Judaism of the Second Temple period does not make distinctions, nor for that matter did Jesus and Paul. Kearsley concedes this, but adds "This may be true, but it seems irrelevant. I do not see how a lack of distinction in Judaism or in the thought of Jesus and Paul can be considered irrelevant.

Kaiser's frustration over the dilemma facing those who see a termination of the Law without a distinction in its various parts cannot compensate for the void of distinction in Jewish and Christian sources. I submit that the resolution to Kaiser's and others' dilemmas is not achieved by the creation of fabricated distinctions in the Law within a segmented historical framework, but by remembering the Torah's pedagogal role in God's redemptive continuum.

## Conclusion

My concern with Dr. Kearsley's article is that by creating an unwarranted polarization between faith and Torah, he suggests a negativity toward the Law which seems exaggerated. His conclusion is patent: Jesus saw it as His mission to replace the legal system with a new Torah. "He will take away from the backs of the common people the unbearable legal burden, like the ungainly and heavy pack upon the back of a camel." Paul merely completes the process, calling for

“internalization” instead of mere observance of “external ordinances.”<sup>8</sup> In the new covenant old and obsolete are equivocal.<sup>9</sup>

The inaccuracies presented by Dr. Kearsley regarding both Second Temple Judaism and the attitudes of Jesus and Paul to the Law are not original, but that does not mean that they should be taken lightly. Jesus did not see his mission as supplanting the Law, nor by His supposed abolition of the Law is His claim to be the Messiah strengthened. Grave misunderstandings among Jews and Christians still exist regarding the meaning and purpose of the ministry of Jesus, particularly concerning His attitude to the Law. If Christian scholarship has any hope of rectifying these misunderstandings, it must first divest itself of its historic distortions of Second Temple Judaism. These mistaken notions are the results of ignorance and of lack of interest in pertinent Jewish sources. Unless we are willing to struggle to understand the historical and religious milieu in Judaism during the close of the Second Temple Period and during the first decades of Christianity, we have little chance of understanding Jesus and Paul, and even less of understanding faith and Torah.

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<sup>8</sup> J. Abelson (in *The Immanence of God*, Hermon Press: New York, 1969, p. 15ff.) challenges the Christian perception that the faith of Rabbinic Judaism was merely an *external* religion: “The implication is, that ‘the righteousness of Scribes and Pharisees’ was merely an external punctiliousness in ceremonial observances of all kinds which left the heart untouched, and implied no underlying spiritual content ... Rabbinic Judaism certainly has a good deal of the outward yoke about it. But it lays quite as much emphasis upon and ascribed quite as much beauty to, the necessity of the inward call. That which we of to-day regard as a yoke need not necessarily have been a yoke to the Jew of Talmudic days.”

<sup>9</sup> Caution must be taken when dealing with the issue of Jesus and “newness” (covenant, Torah, teaching). As David Flusser in his article, “Do You Prefer New Wine?” *Immanuel* (Vol. IX, 1979), pp. 26-31, reminds us, Luke most fully preserves the parable of new wine in old skins. Luke 7:39 concludes, “And no one after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’” Without our diminishing His identification as the Messiah of Israel, Jesus nevertheless saw Himself in the prophetic role of a reformer of Judaism seeking deep changes and not the mere implementation of new ordinances which were of a superficial nature. This is a far cry, however, from saying that He sought to establish a *new* Torah to supplant the existing one.



# {20} Jesus, the Kingdom and the Torah

by Ole Chr. M. Kvarme

General Secretary Norwegian Bible Society

In religious dialogue and polemic throughout the centuries the Christian Church has challenged the people of the Synagogue with the messiahship and the divinity of Jesus. At the same time, it has been difficult for the Church to answer the challenge of the Synagogue as to the meaning of the Torah in the context of its messianic faith. When the traditional view is explained, that Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God put an end to the reign of the Torah for the people of God, it is not so easy to answer the natural Jewish response: “Why should Jesus free us from the good will of God?”

Over the last few decades Jewish scholars have objected strongly to the traditional view that Jesus willfully or absolutely abrogated the Torah. On the contrary – they maintain that Jesus acted in full accordance with the Torah and that His teaching confirmed the validity of the Law of Moses.

David Flusser, the NT scholar of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, has asserted that both the Jewish Torah and the rabbinic regulations were abrogated in the early Church when Christianity became a religion among Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> According to Flusser, however, this was against the intent of Jesus, who never acted or spoke against the contemporary practice of Torah obedience but remained a faithful, Torah-observing Jew. In His emphasis on the validity of the Torah and with His criticism of certain approaches to the Torah, Jesus was not different from His contemporary Pharisees, although Jesus Himself hardly can be called a Pharisee. Jesus’ controversies with the Pharisees in the synoptic tradition may best be understood as internal discussions among Jewish Torah scholars, much in the same way as such discussions are also reflected in later rabbinic literature.<sup>2</sup>

In his book, *Der Rabbi von Nazaret*, Pinchas E. Lapidé also portrays Jesus as a Torah-observant Jew who never contradicted the Mosaic and rabbinic Torah-regulations.<sup>3</sup> Lapidé claims that Jesus’ criticism of the Torah in the synoptic Gospels only concerns a “deification” of the Torah, and that Jesus in this respect stands together with the “Pharisees of love”, the Rabbis Hillel and Akiva. To Jewish scholars like Flusser and Lapidé who are concerned with bringing Jesus back to “His home” (*Die Heimholung Jesus*), it seems to be of major importance to show that Jesus did not break away from the Torah, nor that He put Himself in a position above it.

{21} One of the first professors of Jerusalem’s Hebrew University, Joseph Klausner, took a different position with regard to Jesus’ attitude to the Torah.<sup>4</sup> Klausner also recognized the positive Torah observance of Jesus and maintained that, in this, Jesus shared the views of the Rabbis Hillel and Akiva. However, the fellowship of Jesus with “tax collectors and sinners” and His attitude to ritual matters signify that there was a difference in principle between Jesus and

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<sup>1</sup> Flusser, D. *Jesus*, Hamburg 1968; (German Edition) *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Hebr.), Tel-Aviv 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Flusser, D. Cf. *Jewish Sources*, op. cit. art. “The Torah in the Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 226-234.

<sup>3</sup> Lapidé, P. *Der Rabbi von Nazaret* Trier 1971, particularly pp. 52ff, 60ff.

<sup>4</sup> Klausner, J. *Jesus von Nazaret*, Jerusalem 1952. Cf. also his *von Jesus zu Paulus*, Jerusalem 1950.

rabbinic Judaism. In His radical ethical demand Jesus was more Jewish than Hillel, while His moral perspective and the universal outlook of His faith in God must be regarded as “exaggerated Judaism”. Jesus also disregarded the ceremonial law and its significance, and this attitude later led Paul to draw the logical and universalistic conclusions. If the Jewish people would have followed Jesus, they would have had to pull up their own roots and renounce their existence as a nation.

In this paper we shall try to come to grips with the attitude of Jesus to the Torah in the synoptic Gospels, and we shall attempt to show that a different understanding is possible – different not only from the understanding of the above mentioned Jewish scholars, but also different from the traditional view that Jesus abrogated or broke with the Torah. The basic thesis which will be put forward and expounded in this paper may be summarized as follows: Jesus not only confirmed the validity of the (written) Torah; He also claimed to fulfill it. However, this fulfillment was more than repeating its words and performing its demands; it was an eschatological fulfillment which took place as Jesus preached, ministered and brought near the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of God was the salvific and redemptive entity brought near by Jesus; it became the new context and the eschatological realm for the Torah and for Torah obedience. As Jesus was the focal point of the Kingdom and of the Gospel, He was now seen as the focal point of the Torah: Jesus Himself personified and conferred on His disciples a “new righteousness” and had authority in determining and teaching the good will of God. Thus these three things belong together: Jesus, the Kingdom and the Torah.

Before turning to the Gospel material, we shall give a brief survey of the rabbinic understanding of the Torah as it developed in the first centuries of the common era (sections 1 and 2). This survey will help us to see how Jesus, in His attitude to the Torah, was rooted in the Jewish milieu of His own time, and how the traditions of the synoptic Gospels both are parallel to and different from the developing rabbinic attitudes to the Torah. When we come to the Gospel material, we shall follow an inductive method: starting with some separate Gospel texts concerning the attitude of Jesus to Torah observance (section 3), continuing with Jesus’ statements about Torah commandments in the Sermon on the Mount (section 4) and His basic statement concerning His fulfillment of the Torah (section 5), and finally discussing Jesus’ relationship to the Torah in the wider context of His proclamation of the Kingdom of God (section 6).

## {22} 1. The Rabbinic Concept of Torah

In terms of material the Torah at the time of Jesus was first and foremost considered to be the Pentateuch, which was simply denoted “Torah”.<sup>5</sup> In NT times, however, the prophetic books and the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures were also regarded as comprising Torah. The rabbinic tradition of the time considered the Hebrew Scriptures with its three parts as the Written Torah, and Shammai the sage (50 BC – 30 AD) was the first to distinguish between the Written and the Oral Torah.<sup>6</sup> This Oral Torah is the exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures and particularly the continuing application of its precepts, statutes, customs and traditions transmitted in the rabbinic schools of the last centuries BC and the first centuries AD. From the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD this Oral Torah was gradually written down in the Mishna and the Gemara (the Talmud), the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 2. Chron. 23:18; Matt. 5:17; 12:5; 22:36ff; Luke 2:23 et al

<sup>6</sup> TB Shabbat 31b.

Tosephta and the Midrashim. Thus one of the very early tractates of Talmud emphasizes that both the Decalogue, the Pentateuch, the Prophetic Books, the Writings, the Mishna and the Talmud were given to Moses at Sinai.<sup>7</sup>

This last reference indicates the revelatory aspect of the Torah, both in its Written and Oral form. Although most of the Oral Torah dates from post-NT times and only later became fixed in writing, the concept was already known: the NT speaks about “the tradition of the elders”.<sup>8</sup> This comprehensive understanding of Torah implied for the rabbis that the revealed Torah in its two different forms had been transmitted from the time of Moses to generation after generation: “Moses received the Torah from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the Men of the Great Synagogue.”<sup>9</sup> However there is also a different tendency in the same literature to place an emphasis on the direction of a “continuing revelation”. The revelation at Sinai was understood by the Rabbis to be Torah in its narrow sense, but it also inherently implied the authority to interpret and apply it, “transforming the potential into actuality, and revealing to his generation that which it needs.”<sup>10</sup>

In terms of substance it is important to keep in mind that the Torah comprises precepts, statutes, customs, traditions and also records of Israel’s history. However, with the development of the Oral Torah in NT times, Judaism also emphasized that the Torah is continuously expressed both through commandments (*mitzvot*) and rabbinic decisions concerning conduct and behavior in secular and ritual spheres (*halakhot*). The Decalogue had long been a fixed and given entity, read daily in the Temple,<sup>11</sup> and it was understood to be a comprehensive expression of the Torah.<sup>12</sup> The same emphasis also led to attempts at finding summarizing formulations of the Torah’s content, such as Rabbi Hillel’s classic answer when he was asked by the would-be proselyte to explain the Torah while standing on one foot: “What you dislike yourself, you should not do to your fellowman. This comprises the whole Torah, and the rest is only interpretation.”<sup>13</sup>

{23} However, alongside the attempts at summarizing the Torah, there also developed a tendency which attempted to fix the number of the precepts in the Torah. But it was only in the third century AD that R. Simlai stated what later became normative tradition, that the Torah comprises 613 commandments, 248 positive precepts and 365 prohibitions.<sup>14</sup>

In the last few decades it has often been stated that the Hebrew term *Torah* has been incompletely rendered through the translation “Law”, and that it is better translated by words like “teaching, instruction”.<sup>15</sup> In his important study on the concepts and beliefs of the sages, E. E. Urbach<sup>16</sup> also

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<sup>7</sup> TB Ber.5a. Cf. Meg. 19b and TJ Pe’ah 2:6.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 15:2; 7:3, 5 Cf. Philo, *De Spec. Leg. N*, 150.

<sup>9</sup> P. Avot 1:1. Cf. particularly the commentary in the Marti-Beer edition, Giessen 1927.

<sup>10</sup> From E. E. Urbach, *The Sages, their Concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem 1975, Vol. 1-II, cf. Vol. 1, p. 330. Cf. *Mekh. de R. Ishmael (MRI)*, Bahodesh 9: “For when they all stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, they interpreted the divine as soon as they heard it... As soon as the word came out, they interpreted it.” Also M. Sanh. 11:2; TJ Pe’ah 2:6; TB Meg. 19b

<sup>11</sup> M. Tamid 15:1.

<sup>12</sup> *Pesiqta Rabbati*, Piska 14, 15, W. Braude, Yale Judaica Series, New Haven 1968, Vol. 1 p. 295.

<sup>13</sup> TB Shabb. 31a; cf. TB Makk. 24a.

<sup>14</sup> TB Makk. 23b

<sup>15</sup> Cf. for this discussion, H. Schmid, “Gesetz und Gnade im Alten Testament”. in *Gesetz und Gnade in Alten Testament und im jüdischen Denken*, Hergsb. R. Brunner, Sonderh. Judaica, Zurich 1969.

<sup>16</sup> Urbach, *op. cit.* p. 286f.

maintains this point of view, but he denies that the Septuagint mistakenly translated this Hebrew term into the Greek *nomos*, and that this translation resulted in the usual rendering “Law”. Urbach asserts that the Greek *nomos* correctly renders “Torah” in the milieu of the Alexandrian Jews, expressing: “an institution, embodying the covenant between the people and its God, and reflecting a complex of precepts and statutes, customs and traditions linked to the history of the people and the acts of its rulers, kings and prophets.” Urbach also quotes Plato who speaks about “the constitution and the living regime of a people”; and claims this to be an adequate rendering of both Hebrew *Torah* and Greek *nomos*.<sup>17</sup>

In the comprehensive definition of Urbach we note the reference to the covenant: the concept of Torah cannot be understood except within the wider context of covenant and God’s gracious election of the people. E. Sanders has used the phrase “covenantal nomism” in order to express this pattern of religion:

*“God has chosen Israel and Israel has accepted the election. In His role as King, God gave Israel commandments which they are to obey as best they can.”*<sup>18</sup>

We may illustrate and expound this relationship between election, covenant and Torah through material from one of the earlier, so-called tannaitic, midrashim – *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*. In a commentary on the self-presentation of God which introduces the presentation of the Decalogue in Ex. 20, the question is asked why the Ten Commandments were not given earlier in Israel’s history. A parable is then told about a king who first builds a city-wall, bringing a water supply into the city and fighting battles for the people of a province. He then asks the people if he might become their king; the people respond positively and accept his reign:

*Likewise, God. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them, and fought for them the battle with Amalek. Then He said to them: Let Me be your King. And they said to Him: Yes, yes.*<sup>19</sup>

This paragraph on Ex. 20:2 in the *Mekhilta* is followed by another comment with somewhat different terminology, yet with the same underlying thought concerning the redemptive activity of God preceding the presentation of the Decalogue:

*“I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves in Egypt.” And when they said to Him “Yes, yes”; He continued: “Just as you have accepted My reign (malkhuti), so you must also accept My decrees (g’zerotai)”*.<sup>20</sup>

{24} It is thus the covenantal context which also provides the motivation for Torah observance. The Torah is the *raison d’être* of the people, as stated by a later homiletical midrash: “Israel would have perished from this world and from the world to come if they had not accepted the Torah upon

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<sup>17</sup> Urbach, *op. cit.* p. 289f.

<sup>18</sup> Sanders, *op. cit.* p. 180: cf. pp. 75 and 236

<sup>19</sup> *MRI Bahodesh* 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves at Sinai.”<sup>21</sup> On the one hand it is emphasized that the Torah comprises the good -ill of God for the people, and it should therefore be observed for its own sake (*li-shmah*).<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, it is also stressed that Torah observance brings reward from God both in this world and in the world to come, and that transgression brings punishment.<sup>23</sup> However, the aspect of reward and punishment should not be interpreted in isolation, implying that the inheritance of the world to come is based on a personal surplus of good deeds. The elements of reward and punishment for Torah observance also belong to the context of covenantal thinking. Election and redemption precede the covenant at Sinai. The covenant then proceeds to lead Israel to Torah obedience, both nationally and individually. As well, it provides atonement for transgressions:

*Obedience is rewarded and disobedience punished. In case of failure to obey, however, man has recourse to divinely ordained means of atonement, in all of which repentance is required. As long as he maintains his desire to stay in the covenant, he has a share in God's covenantal promises, including life in the world to come. The intention and effort to be obedient constitute the condition for remaining in the covenant, but they do not earn it.*<sup>24</sup>

On this issue the rabbis understood the conscious and intentional confession of the Shema (“Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One”) as an acceptance and confirmation of one’s belonging to the covenant, which acceptance is then followed by obedience to the commandments:

*R. Joshua b. Karha said: Why does the section “Hear, O Israel” precede “And it shall come to pass if ye shall hearken”? – so that a man may first take upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of heaven and afterward take upon himself the yoke of the commandments.”*<sup>25</sup>

This close relationship of covenant and commandments implied that a transgression of one commandment did not lead to the cutting off from the covenantal fellowship with God, since there were means of atonement. However, a willful breach of the Torah, even if it only concerned the transgression of a minor Torah commandment, would be regarded as casting off the yoke of the Kingdom and rebellion against the covenant, and for such a sin there is no forgiveness.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Seder Eliahu, ed. Friedman, p. 85. Quoted according to M. Kadushin, *Organic Thinking, A Study in Rabbinic Thought*, New York 1938, p. 21f.

<sup>22</sup> TB Pes. 50b; Nazir 23b; Cf. Urbach, *op cit.* pp. 393ff. and S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, New York 1975, pp. 139ff

<sup>23</sup> Cf.

- The articles of faith from Maimonides: “I believe with a perfect faith that the Creator – blessed be His Name – reciprocates good to all who keep His commandments (*mitzvotot*) and punishes all who break His commandments.”

- The OT background can be found in: Prov. 19:17; Ps. 1; 11:5ff; 34:17ff. For an analysis of the OT material, K Koch, Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma in Alten Testament, *ZThK* 52, 1955, 1-42.

- Rabbinic references: M. Qidd. 4:14. M. Sanh 10. Cf. Tos.Qidd. 5:16 and TB Menach.44a; Shah. 49a. Tanchuma, Shelach 14, Buber-ed, Jerusalem 1975, Vol. II, 735 a-b.

<sup>24</sup> Sanders, *op. cit.* p. 180 and 75. Also A Buchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement*, New York 1967 (London 1927), and also F. C. Grant in the extensive prolegomenon to the 1967 edition.

<sup>25</sup> M. Ber. 2:2:5

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Urbach, *op. cit.* pp. 400 ff; Sanders, *op. cit.* p. 236

## 2. The Authority and Validity of the Torah in Rabbinic Tradition

The scribes and the Pharisees at the time of the NT distinguished between “lighter and heavier” precepts of the Written Torah.<sup>27</sup> In general the precepts of the Written Torah were understood more strictly than those of the Oral Torah: “A doubtful case involving Torah-law must be decided stringently; a doubtful case involving Rabbinical law is decided leniently.”<sup>28</sup> The rabbis described the Oral Torah as being a protective hedge around the Written Torah. This description implied the same distinction, but it also expressed the anxiety to avoid any infringement of the Written Law: thus precept was added to precept. Therefore the rabbinic tradition also gives the following exhortation: “Take heed of all what you are told in the Torah; for you do not know from which of the precepts life will issue forth into you.”<sup>29</sup>

{25} In cases of *status confessionis* the attitude among some was very strict, emphasizing observance down to the last detail. According to the book of Maccabees, the Maccabean revolt erupted when Eleazar refused to oblige the Syrian command by eating swine’s flesh and declared: “It is no small sin to eat unclean food; for transgressing the Torah in important matters and in small matters is equally wicked, since in both cases the Torah is detested.”<sup>30</sup> However, a less strict opinion also developed and became widespread: in the name of R. Simeon b. Jehozadak it was reported that such was decided by vote in the upper chamber of the house in Nitza in Lydda: regarding any law of the Torah, if a man is ordered “transgress and be not slain,” let him transgress rather than be slain, except in the case of idolatry, incest and murder.”<sup>31</sup> Also in situations of everyday life where no religious coercion was at hand, the life of a human being was given prior importance, and the transgression of a Torah precept (e.g. a Sabbath precept) was allowed in order to save life.<sup>32</sup>

These discussions and various attitudes, however, did not contradict the absolute and eternal validity of the Torah. The rabbinic tradition continued the post-exilic identification of Wisdom (*chokhma*) and Torah,<sup>33</sup> and regarded the origin of the Torah to be before the creation of the world;<sup>34</sup> the Torah was even instrumental in creation and is one of the three foundations upon which the world rests.<sup>35</sup> Parallel to these protological statements, the pseudepigraphic and rabbinic literature also provide ample statements that the Torah has been given for eternity. An end has been set for heaven and earth, but not for the Torah.<sup>36</sup> The absolute revelatory character of the Torah was also in the course of time ascribed to the Oral Torah, as has already been indicated above. Certain statements from rabbinic tradition even express that the Holy One is bound by halakha. One of the earliest homiletical midrashim lets Moses express his surprise at this fact: “Sovereign of the universe, Thou dost hold in Thy power the creatures of heaven and earth, yet

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<sup>27</sup> TJ Ber. 1:7 and Sanh. 11:6. TB Ber. 4b, Eruv. 21b, Cant. Rabba 1:2

<sup>28</sup> Quoted according to Urbach, *op. cit.* 355. M Tohorot 4:11 for practical application of this maxim, also TB Shabb. 34a and Eruv 45b.

<sup>29</sup> TJ Pe’ah 1:1/15d. TJ Qidd. 61b.

<sup>30</sup> 4. Macc. 5:16ff.

<sup>31</sup> TB Sanh. 74a.

<sup>32</sup> *MRI Shabbata* 1 – end.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ezra 7:14, 25; Jes. Sir.; Pss 1; 19B; 119. Cf. Moore, *Judaism*, Vol. 1 pp. 263ff.

<sup>34</sup> Gen. Rabba 1:1

<sup>35</sup> P. Avot 1:2 and 3:15

<sup>36</sup> J. Sir. 24:9 and 23; Enoch 99:2, 14; Tobit 1:6. Gen Rabba. 10:1. Cf. Moore, *op. cit.*, Vol 1, pp. 269 ff.

Thou dost sit and cite a halakha in the name of a human being.”<sup>37</sup> However, E. Urbach has pointed out that it is particularly in the polemic against the growing Church that this emphasis on the absolute and eternal validity of the Torah is expressed, as the following dictum indirectly illustrates: “Say not another Moses will arise and bring us another Torah from Heaven. I declare to you now: it is not in Heaven – nothing thereof was left in Heaven.”<sup>38</sup>

Along with these rather categorical statements, however, we find in rabbinic literature nuanced opinions on the authority and validity of the Torah. We do not have in mind here the question of authority which arises out of halakhic discussions or divergences between the various rabbinic schools,<sup>39</sup> but rather statements and discussions of a more general nature. In a discussion on the authority of the eschatological prophet (the prophet like Moses spoken of in Deut. 18:15 ff.) some maintained that he will be subject to the authority of the Torah and the halakha, while others contended that he would at the very least have the authority to take back a precept of the Torah, if not abrogate the Torah as such: “Even if he says to you: transgress temporarily one of the precepts ordained by the Torah, as did Elijah on Mount Cannel, hearken unto him.”<sup>40</sup> One has to be very cautious in the interpretation of this last statement, but we may at least assert that it presupposes a fine distinction between God and His reign on the one hand, and His revealed and specific will {26} on the other, for the saying presupposes that God is, after all, Lord of His Torah.<sup>41</sup>

It is particularly in contexts where the coming of the Messiah is in focus, that we also find certain modifications concerning the enduring authority of the Torah and the Sinai revelation. A commentary on Isa. 26 in a later homiletical midrash mentions a “new Torah” which the Holy One interprets as He sits in the Garden of Eden: this is the future Torah to be brought in by the Messiah.<sup>42</sup> Another midrash on Prov. 2:1; 12:1 states similarly that the Torah of this world is considered nothing in comparison to that Torah which the Messiah will bring.<sup>43</sup> The specific relationship between the Torah from Sinai and the Torah of the Messiah has not been expounded by rabbinic literature; some statements indicate that it is actually the Torah from Sinai which in the messianic age “returns in a renewed form”,<sup>44</sup> and an old midrashic commentary on Isa. 51:4 (“For a law shall proceed from me!”) actually states that it is renewed Torah (*hiddush-Torah*) that shall proceed from the Lord.<sup>45</sup> Although these sayings give emphasis to continuity, they also indicate a certain newness and discontinuity with regard to the Torah in the coming age.<sup>46</sup>

Klausner is of the opinion that rabbinic literature provides no evidence that the concept of a new Torah in the messianic age was in existence in NT times, and he asserts that all texts in this respect

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<sup>37</sup> Pes. de R. Kahana, Para 7, Mandelb. edition p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> Deut. Rabba 8:6. Urbach, *op. cit.* p. 307

<sup>39</sup> TB Yev. 102a.

<sup>40</sup> Sifra Bechuqqotai 13; Sifre Deut. 195.

<sup>41</sup> *MRI*, Bachodesh 6.

<sup>42</sup> Yalq. Shim. Isa. 26, No. 429. Cf. W. D. Davies, *The Torah in the Messianic Age/or in the World to Come*, JBL Monograph Series VII, Phila. 1952.

<sup>43</sup> Midr. Qohelet

<sup>44</sup> Cant. Rabba. 2:13; Pes. Rabbati 79:6.

<sup>45</sup> Lev. Rabba 13:3

<sup>46</sup> TB 97b; Avodah Zara 9b.; Shabb. 151b; Nidda 66b. We are here perhaps a little more hesitant in the use of the rabbinic material than R. Santala, *The Messiah in the Tanach and Rabbinic Writings* (Hebr.), Jerusalem 1980, pp. 40ff.



are the result of later development.<sup>47</sup> W. D. Davies, however, asks if the limited material on this issue might just be what is left over from a more widespread concept in NT times. After the fall of Jerusalem, in the year 70 AD it was the tradition of Yochanan Ben-Zakkai which triumphed and he determinatively marked the later rabbinic emphasis on the absolute and eternal validity of the Torah from Sinai. Davies opines that one has to reckon with the possibility that the concept of a “new Torah” to be revealed in the messianic age or in the world to come did actually exist. This “Torah” can neither be considered “new” in the sense that it contradicts the “old”, nor in the sense that it just confirms the old on a different level; nevertheless, it is worthy of the adjective “new”.<sup>48</sup> We are of the opinion that Davies’ evaluation of the sources is correct.<sup>49</sup> However, though it might be appropriate to speak of the concept of “a new Torah” as he does, due to the background in the above mentioned material that we have just covered, we would prefer to denote the Torah of the messianic age or of the world to come as a “renewed Torah”.<sup>50</sup> This “renewal” is then linked to the role and the authority of the Messiah to come and to the acre of the Messiah as the new context for Torah observance.

### 3. Jesus and the Torah – Continuity or Conflict?

After this survey of rabbinic tradition, we now turn to the synoptic Gospels and the relationship of Jesus to the Torah. At the outset we must immediately recognize that the question of the Torah and its observance does not occupy the same central place in the synoptic Gospels as it does in rabbinic literature. Whereas the Torah is the focus of rabbinic literature, the focus of the Gospels is upon the life and teaching of Jesus. We shall later come back to the significance of this.

{27} Nevertheless, the synoptic Gospels picture Jesus both directly and indirectly as a Jew faithful to the Torah. This holds true not only for Matthew, but also for Luke.<sup>51</sup> Luke’s birth narratives portray a family that follows the precepts of the Torah when their firstborn son is born. From the start of His own ministry, Jesus demonstrates His own attachment to the Synagogue and to the Temple and causes others to be obedient to Torah instructions.<sup>52</sup> In His preaching and teaching, Jesus confirms the Torah as the good will of God: in conversation with the rich young man Jesus stresses that only God is good and then quotes the Decalogue. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus refers to the Torah, speaks about the will of His heavenly Father and states that the one acting according to this will shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>53</sup>

However, there are also events and statements of Jesus taken from discussions with Pharisees which usually are understood to be in conflict with the Written Torah or its accepted interpretation. The classic examples concern Sabbath observance. One Sabbath the disciples of Jesus plucked grain, rubbed it in their hands, ate it and were accused by Pharisees of desecrating the Sabbath. Jesus, however, defended His disciples, arguing with a similar event in the life of David and claiming that “the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:1-5). Following this story, the synoptic account relates an event of another Sabbath, when Jesus healed a man with a withered

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<sup>47</sup> J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, New York 1955

<sup>48</sup> W. E. Davies, op. cit. in his conclusion.

<sup>49</sup> Davies, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. the comments of J. Jocz, *Jesus and the law*, *Judaica* 26, 1970, 105-124

<sup>51</sup> Cf. J. Jervell, “The Law in Luke-Acts”, *HTR* 64, 1971; *Luke and the People of God*, Minneapolis 1972, pp. 133ff.

<sup>52</sup> Luke 4:16; 5:14; 17:14

<sup>53</sup> Matt. 10:18ff; 12:50; 7:21; Mark 3:35

hand. Arguing with the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus asks if it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it. Having asked this question, He speaks to the man, whose withered hand is immediately healed (Luke 6:6-11).

In his analysis of these two events and the controversy with the Pharisees, David Flusser maintains that the position of Jesus does not conflict either with the Written or with the Oral Torah.<sup>54</sup> Concerning the disciples in the grain-fields, Flusser argues that the Galilean tradition allowed for collection of already fallen grain and for rubbing it in the hands, and that the disagreement therefore is between two contemporary streams in Judaism. In order to assert his view, though, Flusser must claim that the statement on the actual “plucking” of grain is a subsequent addition to the synoptic text, since plucking on the Sabbath was directly forbidden by the Oral Torah (M. Shabb. VII, 2) and perhaps indirectly by the Written Torah (cf. Ex. 34:21). However, if Flusser were right, Jesus’ scriptural argument concerning David and the eating of the showbread would actually lose much of its sense and force.

The grain-field story and Jesus’ stance on this issue must therefore be explained differently. It seems that the solution lies in the use of the example from the Hebrew Scriptures, and along the lines of the additional Matthean material. The reference both to David in all the synoptic accounts and to the Sabbath service of the priests in the Matthean version implies that Jesus saw the event in the fields as an exceptional one. Therefore, Sabbath observance is fundamentally confirmed, but the focus is shifted from a question of {28} practical Torah observance to a question of authority, as we see in all synoptic versions’ conclusions of the story: “Therefore the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”<sup>55</sup> We agree with an observation made by H. J. Schoeps in this respect:<sup>56</sup> When Jesus stresses His authority as the lord of the Sabbath, He implies a fine distinction between the will of God as an absolute and the word of the Torah as its actual expression. He claims both an authority over the Torah and the right to decide what is according to the will of God.

This may also be seen in the healing of the man with the withered hand. The rabbis of NT times also state that the Sabbath was given for the sake of man and not vice-versa.<sup>57</sup> The contemporaries of Jesus were concerned with putting a hedge around the Torah and with establishing what were the exceptions when Sabbath-precepts could be overruled.<sup>58</sup> They agreed on the principle (later given the cognomen *pikuah nefesh*) that danger to life could overrule the sanctity of the Sabbath, though not in the case of chronic disease.<sup>59</sup> In healing chronic diseases on the Sabbath, Jesus therefore objects to the rabbinic casuistry in question: Jesus does not repeal the Sabbath commandment, but questions whether this rabbinic precept may in the end conflict with the good will of God. Thus Jesus breaks down a hedge which prevents an act of loving kindness on the Sabbath and, by healing the man, He also claims authority to decide what is good and evil.

The story about the disciples of Jesus not performing the required ritual hand-washing and the controversy of Jesus with the Pharisees on that occasion (Matt. 15:1-11) illustrates in a similar

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<sup>54</sup> Flusser, *Jesus. op. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> R. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition, SNTS Mon. Ser. 28*, London 1975, pp. 113ff

<sup>56</sup> “Jesus und das jüdische Gesetz” in H. J. Schoeps, *Studien zur unbekanntenen Religions und Geistesgeschichte, Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Geistesgeschichte* B.3, Berlin 1963

<sup>57</sup> *MRI* to Exod/ 31:13. TB Yoma 85b.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Schoeps *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> M. Yoma VIII, 6.

manner His objection to the Oral Torah. The issue hinges on whether the precept concerning the washing of hands before meals had already become accepted halakha at the time of Jesus, or if it was just a non-binding custom.<sup>60</sup> However, Schoeps has brought forward convincing material concerning the halakhic significance of the ritual handwashing in NT times,<sup>61</sup> and the answer of Jesus clearly spells out His position: He counterattacks the Pharisees by drawing attention to another conflict – one between a precept based on the tradition of the elders and one based on a commandment of the Decalogue. Thus Jesus states His objection to the Oral tradition by confirming a commandment of the Written Torah.<sup>62</sup>

In the same controversy concerning ritual cleanness there are two other aspects to which we must pay attention. First, we see that Jesus afterwards called the people and said: "...not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth" (Matt. 15:11). In conversation with His disciples He then expounds on this, claiming that the evil thoughts of a man's heart are what really defiles: murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness and slander. The Markan version adds that Jesus in this way declared all foods clean, and some also interpret the Matthean rendering as directly undermining the Mosaic regulations as to clean and unclean.<sup>63</sup> The Markan comment is not a direct quote from Jesus, and the actual statement of Jesus cannot strictly be understood as attacking and abrogating the Mosaic Law on this point. But the implication of the event and of the statement of Jesus seem rather to be that of the centrality of the Mosaic and rabbinic regulations concerning ritual purity is set aside and priority is given to the moral and {29} ethical aspects of the Torah. Secondly, in explaining what defilement actually is, Jesus gives a list of trespasses which are clearly related to the Ten Commandments, and He does so after having attacked the Pharisees for not giving authority to one specific precept of the Decalogue (Matt. 15:4, 19).

However, there is little direct NT evidence that Jesus saw an antithetical relationship between the moral law and the ceremonial law and that He abrogated the latter. But the relative silence of Jesus with regard to the ceremonial law and the little that is said about it in this respect, speaks for itself. The table fellowship of Jesus with tax collectors and sinners raised a controversy with the Pharisees (Mark 2:13-17 ff; Matt. 21:31 ff; Luke 7:34; 15:1) and again illustrates His basic attitude in this respect: without abrogating the ritual precepts of the Written Torah, Jesus breaks down the ritual hedge of the oral tradition as He seeks fellowship with the outcast. But this happens as He speaks, acts and focuses upon His own mission to His people.<sup>64</sup>

When Jesus has fellowship with tax collectors, sinners and other outcasts, He encounters them with a call to repentance and forgiveness of sins. In this way He both confirms the validity and the claim of the Written Torah, and claims for Himself a forgiving authority vis-à-vis the Torah which belongs to God alone.<sup>65</sup> But in calling tax collectors and sinners to repentance, forgiveness and a new obedience, Jesus actually also asks them to "follow Him". With respect to this new obedience,

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<sup>60</sup> The latter view is taken by Flusser, *Jesus*

<sup>61</sup> Schoeps, *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> In disagreement with R Hummel, "Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum in Matthäusevangelium", *BET* 33, Munchen 1963, pp. 46ff.

<sup>63</sup> R. Banks, *op. cit.* p. 140, and Schoeps, *op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> This holds true whether the Markan and Matthean versions on specific Hellenistic-Jewish or Palestinian-Jewish traditions. Cf. Banks *op. cit.* p. 143

<sup>65</sup> Luke 5:20ff; 7:47ff; 15 Matt. 9:9-13. Cf. S Aalen, *Jahvistisk Kristologi*, *TTK*, 1968

Jesus therefore goes beyond the Torah and puts Himself in the position of both Torah and God.<sup>66</sup> These elements of the preaching of Jesus, however, must be understood in the wider context of the eschatological context of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God, which was the central theme of His ministry and to which we shall return later.

We may now draw some preliminary conclusions from this survey of both the controversies with the Pharisees and other relevant synoptic material: 1. Jesus objects to the rabbinic development of Oral Torah, but confirms the authority of the Written Torah. 2. In confirming the Written Torah, however, Jesus makes a fine distinction between the will of God and its actual expression in the Written Torah. He then claims for Himself both an authority above the Torah and the right to decide on good and evil. The controversies with the Pharisees thus become more focused on the person of Jesus and His authority rather than on detailed questions concerning Torah observance. 3. But as Jesus confirms the Torah and affirms His own authority, He gives preference to the ethical aspect of the Torah before its ritual aspect. He focuses on the Decalogue in various instances and draws attention to His own actual teaching. In this way He also provides for continuity in substance between the Written Torah and His own teaching. Let us now consider the central aspects of Jesus' teaching in more detail.

#### 4. Jesus and the New Righteousness (Matt. 5:21-48)

The so-called antitheses of Matt. 5:21-48 are a comprehensive collection of material which illustrates Jesus attitude to the Torah and to His own ethical teaching. These antitheses deal with the fifth and the sixth commandments of the Decalogue (or the sixth and the seventh according to the Jewish numbering), the precepts concerning divorce, oaths, {30} retaliation (an eye for an eye) and the commandment to love one's neighbor. We recognize the particular Matthean outline of this part of the Sermon on the Mount, but we cannot deal here with the complex issue of form and tradition history. Suffice it to say that we consider the antitheses to be a genuine rendering of the teaching of Jesus Himself.

The antitheses are preceded by a saying of Jesus that the righteousness of the disciples "shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20; see below). Goppelt is probably right in paraphrasing the introduction to each of the antitheses in the following manner: "You have heard in the synagogue what God spoke through Moses to the elders, your forefathers ... But I say unto you."<sup>67</sup> Thus Jesus wants to deal with His contemporaries' understanding of the Hebrew Torah and to demonstrate what is the "new righteousness".

Flusser has argued that the way Jesus deals here with the precepts of the Hebrew Scriptures must be understood against the background of rabbinic tradition which distinguishes between *mitzva qalla* (a light precept, of lesser importance) and *mitzva chamurah* (a heavy, important precept). This rabbinic tradition emphasizes the need to observe the less important precepts as well as the more important ones in the Torah.<sup>68</sup> According to Flusser the sayings of Jesus concerning anger with one's brother in connection with the fifth commandment, and about adultery "in the heart" are typical illustrations of the principle that the lighter precept is equally important as the

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. S. Aalen, *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Gottingen 1975, Vol. 1, p. 150.

<sup>68</sup> Flusser, *The Torah in the Sermon...*, *op. cit.* Cf. P. Avot 2:1

heavier. This observation may be correct and would provide a natural explanation for the connection between Jesus' statement about the least commandment in Matt. 5:19 and the antithetical section of 5:21-48. The sayings about anger and adultery of the heart would then not imply abrogation of the respective commandments, but rather an expansion of their application. This expansion has its background both in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in contemporary traditions.<sup>69</sup>

However, this key to the antithetical passages does not seem to leave us with a suitable understanding of what Jesus says about divorce, oaths and the precept of retaliation. Goppelt, among others, has attempted to understand the antitheses in light of the two kinds of law-material in the Hebrew Scriptures: partly apodictic precepts or absolute statements, and partly casuistic regulations.<sup>70</sup> In Judaism, as already was the case in the Hebrew Scriptures, apodictic statements and casuistic regulations were connected. This connection often led to a limited area of application for the apodictic precepts as a result of casuistic regulations. One consequence of this was that apodictic precepts were observed as achievable casuistic regulations, and this within a context that had dealt with the reality of evil and its power. It is this point which Jesus attacks in His teaching about the Torah. In His comment on the commandments concerning killing and adultery, Jesus shows that they cannot be limited but have an absolute validity. The same holds true for the statement on loving one's neighbor. When Jesus quotes Lev. 19:18 and adds "and you shall hate your enemy", he was referring to an attitude to be found possibly in the Qumran community, but probably also in other circles of His contemporary society.<sup>71</sup> Thus Jesus not only makes use of the rabbinic distinction between *mitzva qalla* and *chamurah*, whereby a maximum ethical demand is applied, but He restores the absolute validity of the apodictic precepts and emphasizes their unlimited area of application. It is therefore logical when Jesus summarizes the antitheses and the demand for a new righteousness by saying: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

This summary of the antitheses shows that Jesus demanded the doing of good without restriction, and that He did not accept compromising what is just and good with what is evil, such as was done in society.<sup>72</sup> On this issue we also have to understand the way Jesus {31} explains the casuistic regulations of the Hebrew Scriptures concerning divorce, oath and the precept of retaliation: the saying on divorce points to the God-given and unbreakable unity of husband and wife in matrimony; the statement on oaths points to the need for perfect truth in all speech; and the saying on retaliation is followed up by the commandment of unlimited love, emphasizing that human fellowship which has been hurt and injured can only be restored, not through retaliation, but when evil is conquered by forgiving and unlimited love.<sup>73</sup> In this way Jesus goes beyond the details and regulations of the Mosaic Torah and beyond an understanding of Torah which reduces the demands of God upon us in our struggle against the reality of evil.

## 5. Jesus and the Messianic Fulfillment of the Torah (Matt. 5:17-20)

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. the exegetical commentaries and Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum NT aus Talmud und Midrash*, Munchen 1956, Vol. 1, pp. 280ff.

<sup>70</sup> Goppelt, *op. cit.* pp. 150ff.

<sup>71</sup> 1. QS 1:9-11: "You shall love the sons of the light...and detest the sons of darkness."

<sup>72</sup> Goppelt, *op. cit.* p. 152.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. W. Grundman, *Das Evangelium nach Mattheus*, *THKNT I*, Berlin 1971, p. 164. Grundman refers to 1 Enoch 49:1

We finally turn to the text in which Jesus most explicitly confirms the Torah as the good will of God, a text whose interpretation is also much disputed: in Matt. 5:17-20 Jesus states that He has not come to destroy the Torah or the prophets, but to fulfill, that He confirms the yokes and the titles and the least commandments of the Torah. He also speaks of the new righteousness of His disciples.

The decisive key for understanding this saying is the interpretation of the word “fulfill” (*plerosai*). Some assert that the word indicates that Jesus just came to act and live perfectly according to the Torah, while others maintain that the whole Sermon on the Mount indicates that Jesus came to bring the correct interpretation of the Torah, thus fulfilling it.<sup>74</sup> A closer analysis of the text will indicate that a somewhat different interpretation seems more natural. The word “fulfill” (*plerosai*) is the same one used by Jesus, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, concerning messianic fulfillment of promises and statements in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>75</sup> This aspect is also strengthened when Jesus says here that He came (*elthon*) to fulfill the Torah, a verbal form often used to express the consciousness of Jesus about His own mission and ministry (Matt. 10:34f; 20:28f *et al.*).<sup>76</sup> Further we see that Jesus expresses His own relationship to the Torah and the prophets through a contrasting statement: not to abolish or destroy (*katalysai*), but to fulfill (*plerosai*).

In similar language the Second Book of Maccabees tells about the Maccabean victory over the Syrians (164 BC) and the subsequent restoration of the Temple service: Judah the Maccabee and his compatriots “regained the Temple renowned all over the world, they freed the city and restored the laws which were on the verge of abolition, since the Lord showed favor graciously to them.”<sup>77</sup> This quotation from 2. Macc. with its Greek original reflects a traditional expression regarding Torah-observance, through the use of the two words: abolish – restore (Gk. *katalysai* – *epanouthosai*; Heb. *battel* – *qayyem/haqim*), {32} and some have interpreted this as being the background for the Matthean saying. However, Jesus says “fulfill” (Gk. *plerosai*; Heb. *malle*), and this is recognizably different. But the saying about the Maccabees may serve in any case as a close contrast.

We must keep in mind, however, that the situation to which Jesus is speaking is very different from the struggle of the Maccabees against the Syrians, and the role and ministry of Jesus is different from the role of Judah the Maccabee. Jesus’ reference to both Torah and Prophets is a positive reference to the past in the context of fulfillment. But Jesus is at the same time involved in internal controversies with contemporary attitudes to the Torah, and He conveys to His disciples a qualitatively different righteousness: the righteousness which is of the Kingdom of God, brought near by Jesus (Matt. 5:20 – cf. 3:15; 5:10; 6:33). When Jesus came to fulfill the Torah, it was thus more than a confirmation of the Torah demonstrated by living according to its precepts or a restoration of the Mosaic Torah to the people. Through His life, His ministry and His teaching Jesus brought the Torah with Him into a new stage of salvation history, into the age of messianic fulfillment which also meant the realization of the good will of God in a new realm.

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<sup>74</sup> E.g. G. Barth, “Das Gesetzesverständnis des Evangelisten Matthaus”, in Bornkam-Barth-Held, *Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthaus-Evangelium*, *WMANT* 1, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1960/70, pp. 60ff. For a comprehensive treatment of this issue, cf. C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, New York 1968, Vol. 2, pp. 4611.

<sup>75</sup> Matt. 26:54ff; Mk. 14:49; Luk 4:21; 24:44; *et al.*

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Grundtmann, *op. cit.* pp. 143ff.

<sup>77</sup> 2. Macc. 2:22

This statement on the fulfillment of the Torah is further expounded in two steps in Matt. 5:17-20. First, Jesus confirms the validity of the Written Torah as the good will of God (w. 18-19). Jesus here follows contemporary rabbinic emphasis concerning the validity of the Torah even down to the single letter and the smallest “jots” on the square Hebrew letters. As in similar rabbinic texts, the mentioning of “until heaven and earth pass” does not imply any conclusion concerning the validity of the Torah after the passing of heaven and earth.<sup>78</sup> Thus the expression “until all be fulfilled” is to be considered as a further emphasis on the continuing validity of the Torah for the sake of its realization. After this confirmation comes the statement on the new righteousness which is expounded in the antitheses as discussed above. The Torah is to be realized in a new righteousness, and this righteousness belongs to the Kingdom of God, the new salvific realm in which the Torah is fulfilled by Jesus.

## 6. Jesus, the Kingdom and the Torah

A statement similar to the Matthean passage on the fulfillment of Torah through Jesus is found in Luke:

*The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail (Luke 16:16f).<sup>79</sup>*

Similar to the Matthean passage, this statement of Jesus in Luke stresses that the Torah has not been abolished or set aside; on the contrary, its validity is confirmed in a rather rabbinic manner. However, the Lukan saying emphasizes that a new reality now represents **{33}** the context for the Torah: the eschatological Kingdom of God, which has been brought near by Jesus.

The Kingdom of God as the new context for the Torah is also implicit in the Matthean text of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus’ statement about His fulfillment of the Torah and about the new righteousness follows the Beatitudes. These sayings are marked by the recurring: “for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 5:1, 10). Some of the exhortations in the Sermon on the Mount are also summarized by Jesus’ basic call: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness!” (Matt. 6:33). It is also important to note that the Sermon on the Mount comes immediately after Jesus’ call to the people concerning His program: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” (Matt. 4:17). The Sermon also comes immediately after the summary of Jesus’ ministry with its emphasis upon His preaching of “the gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). To be sure, this last point touches on Matthean editing of the material, but on the basis of the synoptic parallel material there can be no doubt that the preaching of the Kingdom also is the proper context for understanding Jesus and the Torah.

The Kingdom of God in the preaching ministry of Jesus is that entity in salvation history which brings fulfillment and realization of the patriarchal and prophetic promises and of the will of God, as expressed in the Torah. However, “the Kingdom of God” in Jesus’ speech cannot simply be rendered by the narrow “reign of God” (*Gottesherrschaft*). The phraseology of the synoptic

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. the above discussion on this point in the section on rabbinical material.

<sup>79</sup> Flusser, *Jewish Sources*, p. 41 and his translation of Matt. 11:11, has on many occasions pointed to the fact that this saying of Jesus must be understood against the background of the midrashic interpretation of Micah 2:12-13, and in connection with the messianic concept *poretz gader* – the one breaking through the fence.



material and the *logia* of Jesus indicate that both “a realm” as well as the “rule” of God are important elements of this synoptic concept<sup>80</sup> – it is the qualitative reality and the realm of salvation which is marked both by God’s active redemption of men and by His presence and rule: “The Kingdom of God conveys in the age of fulfillment the promised salvation to men”.<sup>81</sup> This concept of the Kingdom differs from the rabbinic understanding of the same phrase (*malkhut hashamayim*) with its emphasis on God’s reign, but it has not lost touch with the dimension of hope found in the kingdom concept of rabbinic eschatology.<sup>82</sup> The synoptic concept of the Kingdom does not partially emphasize the present aspect, but stresses that the Kingdom is breaking its way into this world until Christ finally comes, and that then the eschatological completion will take place and the Kingdom will be absolute in God’s new world.<sup>83</sup> In accordance with this, Jesus confers a new righteousness upon His disciples and prescribes pertinent ethics for those who now “enter the Kingdom”. These ethics and righteousness express the presence of the Kingdom, anticipate its coming in glory and also give entrance into the eternal Kingdom as it will be revealed in glory. The preaching and ministry of Jesus and His gift of a new righteousness bring about a fulfillment of the Torah as the good will of God, in accordance with the messianic and prophetic promise for the age of salvation – as expressed, for example, by the prophet Jeremiah: “After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:33).

{34} The coming and the presence of the Kingdom is linked to the person of Jesus. In the same manner the realization of the Torah in the age of fulfillment is linked to the person of Jesus, His teaching and ministry. It is therefore difficult to avoid the conclusion that the phrase “But I say unto you” in the antitheses in Matt. 5 expresses a particular self-consciousness on the part of Jesus about authority vis-à-vis the Torah. Thus the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount stresses that Jesus “taught them as one having authority” (Matt. 7:29). It is worth recognizing that both Matthew and Luke end the sermon of Jesus with the parable of the man who built his house on the rock, and with the request of Jesus to His disciples both to listen and to obey His sayings (Matt. 7:24ff.). These words and similes describing the teaching of Jesus are also used extensively in rabbinic literature about the Torah. The words and the teaching of Jesus thus receive validity compatible to that of the Torah, and the authority of Jesus remains above the Torah: not in contradiction to the Torah, but from the vantage-point of the One who has fulfilled the Torah in the context of a new revelation and the coming of the Kingdom.

At this point we may again bring into focus the Second Temple Jewish background of Jesus and of His milieu. In our survey of rabbinic teaching on the Torah, we emphasized that the Torah must be understood in the context of covenant: the redemption from Egypt precedes the giving of the Torah at Sinai, as expressed in the above quoted saying: “You have accepted my reign (*malkhuti*; i.e. at the redemption from Egypt), now accept My decrees! (i.e. at Sinai).” The same basic pattern now applies to the eschatological and messianic ministry of Jesus. Jesus is the eschatological redeemer who now brings the Kingdom of God near, and who Himself personifies the redeeming grace and work of God. Therefore He also has authority as the eschatological teacher of the will of God for the people. Just as there is both continuity and newness with regard to the redemptive work of God through Jesus in the transition from the Old to the New Covenant, so there is also both continuity

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<sup>80</sup> S. Aalen, *Jesu forkyndelse om Guds Rike*, Oslo 1968, pp. 92ff.

<sup>81</sup> S. Aalen “‘Reign’ and ‘House’ in the Kingdom of God”, *NTS*. 8, 1962, pp. 215-40

<sup>82</sup> Cf. art. “Basileia”, “Rabbinic Judaism”, in *ThWNT*

<sup>83</sup> S. Aalen, *op. cit. Jesu* and *NTS*

and newness with regard to the Torah and the will of God in the teaching of Jesus. But the continuity and the discontinuity have first to be viewed in terms of the Kingdom, and only then in terms of Torah. As Jesus personifies the Kingdom, He also personifies the Torah, having exclusive and unique authority to determine and teach the will of God.

## Conclusion

We may now summarize and conclude our findings with regard to Jesus and the Torah in the synoptic Gospels.

1. Jesus not only confirmed the validity of the Torah; He also claimed to fulfill it. But this fulfillment involves more than repeating its words, performing its demands and acting out its instructions. This was an eschatological fulfillment which took place as He preached, ministered and brought near the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus these three things belong together: Jesus, the Kingdom and the Torah, and exactly in this order; the precise phrase describing His relationship to the Torah is this: He *fulfilled* the Torah.

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2. However, as Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God and came as the eschatological *redeemer from above* (Messiah, Son of God), He stood on the side of God in His *eschatological renewal of the Torah*. In this respect Jesus followed two basic lines also found in the rabbinic attitude to the Torah: the *covenant as the proper context* for the Torah (redemption/the grace of God's Kingdom – the decrees of God/life in the Kingdom), as well as the rabbinic hope for an eschatological *renewal of the Torah in the messianic age*. The identity of Jesus as eschatological redeemer and His renewal of the Torah provide both for continuity and discontinuity with the Mosaic Torah within the context of the Kingdom.

3. The teaching and preaching of Jesus are marked by a wealth of references to the Hebrew Scriptures, and there is a basic use of the Decalogue and of the double "love-commandment". Jesus thus provides for *continuity in substance* between the Written Torah and life according to God's will in the Kingdom. At the same time Jesus objects to halakhic regulations which limit the application of Torah commandments. He establishes an unlimited and absolute application of the commandments in the context of the new righteousness of the Kingdom of God. This is the new and Messianic aspect of Jesus' Torah and teaching.

The Torah of the Hebrew Scriptures is still valid: not only as witness to the redeeming activity and grace of God (the Gospel), but also with regard to the will of God (Law). But as Jesus is the focal point and the personification of the Kingdom and the Gospel, He is now also the focal point of the Torah: the Torah must now be read, interpreted and applied in the context of the "new righteousness" which He confers upon His disciples, and which is personified, determined and taught by Him. This relationship between Jesus and Torah in the synoptic Gospels also has important implications for the life of the Church and its encounter with the Synagogue:

A. Jesus' confirmation of the written Torah is a call to the Church to renew its commitment to the biblical Torah, with Jesus as its eschatological teacher. There should be no room for antinomian attitudes in a church which proclaims Him as Lord and Savior.

B. The fact that Jesus came to fulfill the Torah should imply that our witness to Jewish people should combine the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, Redeemer and Son of God with a positive confirmation of the Torah. The synoptic gospels leave no door open for a two-way theology which

makes Jesus the way to God for Gentiles and the Torah the way to God for Jews. In His life, His death and resurrection, Jesus brought the Kingdom of God near and fulfilled the Torah for Jews and Gentiles alike; His name must therefore be proclaimed as the one name of salvation.

C. The teaching of Jesus concerning the Torah and its fulfillment is also a call to the Church to proclaim and apply in its life the “new righteousness” which He confers on His disciples. When Jesus teaches the new righteousness He not only reveals sin in our lives, but He also confers upon His disciples this righteousness with its forgiveness, love and holiness. When we speak of Christian witness to Jewish people, then shouldn't this new righteousness arouse among Jewish people that jealousy about which Paul later spoke and which today also should lead to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior?

# {39} RESPONSE

by Ronald H. Lewis

*Secretary of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance*

to;

“Jesus, the Kingdom and the Torah”

Having accepted the task of composing a response to Ole Kvarme’s paper, I feel the need to express my excuses at the outset. Upon actually seeing the paper, I now realize that it should have been given to a scholar. To adapt Amos, I am neither a scholar nor the son of a scholar. I must confess to being a trifle lost in the wordiness of the paper; upon reflection, I do not honestly know what certain phrases mean.

In case this should be seen as an easy option, let me go further. I read recently that the preference of so many non-churchgoers for the archaic liturgy of Cranmer in the Church of England’s 1662 Prayer Book might be due to their unconscious desire not to have to think about what the words actually mean. I would never accuse Kvarme of doing this, but it does seem to me that abstractions are unhelpful, and that certain phrases may be taken for granted by theologians until someone challenges their meaning. One such phrase is “... the kingdom of God, which is the new salvific realm in which the Torah is fulfilled by Jesus.” “kingdom” and “realm” are tautologous, so what is actually being said? This is particularly relevant to the summary of his thesis. I find the concept of the kingdom of God as the *movement* of Jesus and his followers more helpful – (cf. Bivin and Blizzard’s *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*). It would not be true to say that the Hebraic concepts are *never* abstract or static, but nevertheless the tendency is towards the dynamic. To think of the kingdom as an “entity” is to risk abstracting it; to place it in the eschatological is to risk taking it out of history. Since Torah is about actively obeying God, to move out of history is to lose this activity.

In fact, we all agree that the ethical teaching of Jesus is not just for the future but is for here and now – or do we? Does the world of conservative evangelical theology sometimes slip into that perversion of dispensationalism known as hyperdispensationalism which denies the need to obey the Scriptures on the grounds that we have the “law” written upon our hearts? The testimony of the Church throughout history does not back up such an assertion. I sometimes feel that this removal of Scripture from history has been responsible for confining the Gospel to individual salvation alone, and for failing to maintain the prophetic (in what I consider to be the *true* sense – i.e. *not* the predictive) stance which challenges society, including both governments and political parties. If this comment appears to stray from the purpose of the paper, let me insist that no concept of Torah can omit {40} such a concern and no reference to the kingdom of God and His righteousness can be confined to the individual alone. Kvarme discusses the rabbinic concept of Torah in order to recover the concept of Torah in New Testament times. This is fair enough. He brings out the necessary point that Torah is a gift of God; so often it is presented as an imposition of laws. This latter perspective comes across, however, in the fence built about Torah which, for rabbinic

Judaism, became Torah itself. Nevertheless, it is right to understand Torah as God's provision of a way by which His people could express their thanksgiving and show their obedience. Such a concept may be properly compared to the early Christian concept of "the Way." The Mekhilta reference is an excellent illustration of this, and bears upon what has already been brought out by Kvarme concerning the kingdom of God.

In his section on the validity of the Torah, I am not sure that Kvarme's presentation of rabbinic speculations about Moses and his authority (e.g. to recall a precept) is of much value to us. Perhaps I am expressing a gut-reaction; nevertheless, one must be on guard these days lest one is led into an overly sentimental view of rabbinics. Obviously there is much to be learned from this discipline but, as one who "escaped" from Orthodox Judaism, I do not want to be entrapped in a new speculative casuistry. The discussion on the possibility of a new Torah *may* or *may not* have been current at the time of Jesus; thus it seems speculative.

When it comes to considering Jesus either as a Teacher of the Law or as one who speaks in antithesis to the Law, we find ourselves in part at the mercy of manuscript variants. Is Kvarme right to avoid this issue? There is tremendous problem about Jesus' teaching equating divorce with adultery. This issue is dealt with very carefully in *Messiah: Six Lectures on the Ministry of Jesus* authored and published by J.C. O'Neill (O'Neill is now at New College, Edinburgh). In the phrase "the son of man is lord of the Sabbath", is it so obvious that "son of man" is Jesus? The phrase could perhaps mean "a man", and may refer to King David who is cited as a precedent.

Jesus' antithetical statements are dealt with in what I would consider an acceptable way, but I wonder if it is necessary to take such a roundabout path. The Greek particle *de* can, it is true, be used in the structure "on the one hand..., on the other hand...", but it can also mean "and in addition..." Where a direct contrast is intended the Greek tends to use *alla*. In other words, it could be translated "you have heard it said of old..., and in addition, I tell you..." This interpretation fits in with Jesus carrying the Torah to its conclusion – i.e. in one sense fulfilling it. If the *lex talionis* was, as many now agree, a restriction of vengeance, this law was a demonstration of mercy; therefore "to turn the other cheek" expounds on the possibility of merciful behavior. In this Jesus is not abrogating but going further. There are Jewish vegetarians who would say that their behavior is the ultimate in {41} *kashrut*, using the same type of reasoning.

It is fair to say, as Kvarme does, that there is no evidence for Jesus seeing an antithetical relationship between the moral and ceremonial laws, and then to note the comparative silence of Jesus on ceremonial. Micah 6 stresses certain fundamentals that God requires; Jesus and Hillel both respond with statements about God's essential requirements. It is unlikely that any of these examples can validly prove a contradiction within Torah, but they do look realistically upon a world of people who do not observe the ritual properly. Jesus quite obviously does not reject such people, and Kvarme notes this. Compassion in dealing with particular cases does not invalidate the general principles by which Jesus Himself lived. Thus Messiah can stand against adultery (to the extent that He sees planned sexual adventure/lust in the heart as already being effectual adultery), yet He can accept that divorce was allowed by Moses "because of your hardness of heart." Since this study is on the Synoptics, we will not cite the woman taken in adultery (John 8). Certainly Jesus does make distinctions in the Law between what is important and what is less important. Matt. 23:23 should not be literally understood to mean that what goes into a man does *not* defile him, but rather that, to quote O'Neill, "of course what goes into a man defiles him, but what is far

more important than that defilement is the defilement which he utters.” This is another example of how the Semitic stricture of Jesus’ statement leads to misunderstanding when a straight negative is accepted. If Jesus had been legislating about divorce, He would surely have been clearer in His affirmations; here His expositions are guidelines rather than new regulations.

In his later treatment of the kingdom of God, Kvarme moves nearer to removing the objections with which I opened. Nevertheless, the problem of the “present-but-not-yet” nature of the kingdom has been a readily available tool for those who wished to avoid the ethics implied. If the kingdom as God’s movement is breaking into our time, then these ethics are neither a matter of mere hope nor an interim ethic, but are an example of how a people behaves when they are actually in full covenant relationship with God and with each other. This example is therefore worthy of imitation. Yes, Kvarme is right to assert that Christ is the focal point of the kingdom – for there we see the direct and clear example of God’s rule being accepted in a dynamic way. Messiah challenged those who thought they were obedient and called those who knew they were not to the possibility of real obedience. In so doing He made claims which some considered blasphemous.

These claims seemed to His opponents to be reserved for God alone. Was it a new righteousness that He taught? Not if Jesus was being true to the biblical concept of righteousness already described in the Law. Rather, He was refining the contemporary ideas of righteousness and so was presenting a *renewed* understanding of God’s righteousness. This was a renewed Torah. Just as we now know that the Bible does not teach of a New Israel but of a *renewed* Israel, so it is a renewed covenant which has its focal point in the life and teaching of Jesus.

# {43} Jewish Survival and its Significance for the Church

by Menachem Benhayim

*Israel Secretary of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance and editor of Beshuv, Messianic Jewish journal in Hebrew published in Jerusalem*

The history of the Jewish people has continued for almost four millennia. While the definition of the adjective “Jewish” has undergone radical changes throughout its long history, for the most part it has been related to the biblical covenant expressing a religious/spiritual meaning.

The term “Jewish” originally referred to the clan of Judah, then a tribe within the whole people of Israel, and later to the political unit distinct from Israel (the Kingdom of Judah). At one time it expressed geographical limitation to describe those who lived in the area of Judea, but in the Diaspora the adjective “Jewish” became a general designation for all Israelites or Hebrews. In modern times it has usually referred to those who adhere to some stream of normative Judaism; and more recently, in a broader application, it includes those devoid of any religious adherence to Judaism.

As a result of the historical association of the term “Jewish” with the religion of Judaism, other terms have been proposed (e.g. “Hebrew”) by those wishing to make a clear distinction between Judaism and the ethnic identity of the Jews. For the purpose of this article, the term “Jewish” will be used to define the entire community of people, whether or not they adhere to some form of mainstream Judaism.

## The Church and the Jews

The Church has generally assigned a deeper meaning to the terms “Jew” and “Israel.” Thus Paul wrote, “One is a Jew inwardly and true circumcision is of the heart” (Rom. 2:29). Nevertheless, he did not mean that the Church had become either Israel or the Jewish people. Nor does the sharing of the spiritual essence of “Jewishness” with the Church imply the transfer of Jewish identity from the original people to the Church. Paul continued to refer to non-Christian Jews as his “kinsmen” (Rom. 9:1-5; 11:1-2) and to Christian non-Jews as Gentiles (Romans 11:13; 16:4).

{44} The New Testament affirms a special relationship between the Church and the Jewish people because of what Paul describes as the “ingrafting” onto the Jewish “olive tree” (Rom. 11:16-24) and because of the special Abrahamic faith connection (Gal. 3:7). This in no way, however, annuls the unique historic identity of the Jewish people which in both the Old and New Testaments is upheld (Jer. 31:35-37; 46:28; Rom. 11:1-2, 25-26; Rev. 7:4-8; 21:12). We intend to explore aspects of this special relationship as it pertains to the preservation of the identity of the Jewish people in the past and present.

## Biblical and Contemporary Jewry

The fact of an historical link between contemporary Jewry and biblical Israel is denied by many sectarians today, usually with anti-Jewish motives. Their claim need not be dealt with seriously here. More pertinent to our discussion is the significance of that link for the Church, which link has been the subject of long debate. In Romans 9 through 11 we see that already in Apostolic times the debate had begun. Paul's comments and his example, together with that of the other Jewish leaders of the Church, should have dispelled any thoughts that the Jewish people had been permanently displaced by the Church as God's elect. The Church of the Circumcision was fundamental and crucial to the formation of the Church Universal, and in apostolic times it continued to be a living part of the Jewish people. True, it contained divisive and heretical elements which resisted the Pauline revelation for the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 4:17); but the sectarians did not represent the whole of the Jewish Christian circumcised body (Gal. 2:7; Acts 21:20-26).

Scholars continue to debate how long a recognizable Jewish presence existed within the Church. Most agree, however, that by some period no later than the fourth century any Jewish Christian identity within the Church had dissipated. Likewise all traces of Jewish Christian elements within Judaism had disappeared by the end of the second or third century. The struggle for the survival of Jewish identity fell into the hands of the rabbinic stream of Judaism. Thus, the Synagogue became the keeper of the flame of the Jewish people and religion.

## Two-Pronged Remnant

We note that the Apostle Paul wrote of the hardening (porosis) of "part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles come in" (Romans 11:25). Even if this porosis affected the main part of the Jewish people, Paul still believed that a significant Jewish Christian remnant would continue within Israel and within the Church. There was such a two-pronged remnant in his day. Evidence for this can be seen in the Book of Acts and in the epistles, especially Romans 11:1-6 (the "Elijah remnant"). In addition, he noted that through the {45} "trespass (of the mainstream of the Jewish people), salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous" (Rom. 11:11). In other words, the Jewish/Gentile Church was to be an additional means for accomplishing the divine purpose vis-à-vis the Jewish people (Rom. 10:19; 11:11, 14, 15).

We may ask, in this vision of a Christian remnant living within Israel, is there a contradiction to the teaching of the Apostle of the unity of Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ (Eph. 2:11-22)? Not at all! The concept of breaking down the wall of partition and mutual hostility between Jew and Gentile in Christ only reinforced the Pauline vision of two distinctive but united components in the body of Christ. One was to live within the historic Jewish people and the other among the Gentiles.

## Ecclesiastical Opposition

Eventually, neither the Gentile nor the Jewish world would tolerate the existence of such a fraternal Jewish/Gentile relationship. We know that "the teaching of contempt" vis-à-vis the Jews was developed among leading Church Fathers. It was applied not only toward the mainstream of the Jewish people who did not accept Jesus and the New Covenant, but also toward the orthodox Jewish Christians who sought to maintain their Jewish identity within the Church. Finally, Jewish Christians were expected to renounce all ties with their people. This was reinforced by the theology of Jewish



“deicide” and “perpetual guilt” for the crucifixion and of “the God Who has always hated them,” as taught by churchmen like John Chrysostom and others.

Inevitably the Church became a thoroughly Gentile body, and every move into it by Jews meant their total “Gentilization”, culturally and otherwise. This, of course, was not the kind of unity of Jews and Gentiles outlined in the New Testament, but rather the dissolution of the Jewish component into the Gentile mass. No amount of semantics concerning “spiritual Semites” and “spiritual Israel” could disguise the fact that even the most sincere efforts by the Church to win Jews to Christ was working against Jewish survival.

## Jewish Mainstream Opposition

The Jewish community cannot of course be absolved from its share of responsibility for the Jewish Christian demise. Even before a thoroughly Gentilized Church had developed, the Jewish community had begun taking steps to neutralize and eventually banish Jewish {46} Christians. There was the well-known “Birkat HaMinim” (the malediction against heretics) preventing their participation in synagogue worship, the imposition of “herem” (excommunication) in many areas of life (i.e., against the use of Jewish Christian physicians), and finally the total banishing of Jewish Christians from the Jewish community during the age when Jewish society was under monolithic rabbinic control.

## Polarized Church and Jewry

It is a matter of debate as to what extent early Jewish hostility to the Church and to Jewish Christians contributed to the Church Fathers’ hostility to Jews and Judaism. It is also difficult to assess any negative contribution by the early Jewish Christians themselves to their own final disappearance. The post-biblical evidence concerning them comes mainly from hostile sources in the Church and Synagogue and quite often presents tendentious history. Whatever the causes, Jewish opposition to the presence of Christians within Israel and Gentile opposition to a Jewish presence within the Church combined to polarize the two communities and to form the stereotyped concept which persists to this day: A Christian is a Gentile and a Jew is a non-Christian.

Both communities suffered the effects of their mutual exclusiveness. We can only speculate, on the basis of the New Testament experience, how beneficial a strong Jewish presence in the body of Christ would have been as a counterbalance to pagan tendencies, to antinomianism and to the disregard for Scripture which time and again defaced the Gentile churches. Likewise, we may imagine the impact of a Gentile Christian component respectful of its Jewish partner challenging their Jewish brothers, and through them the Jewish people, to the fulfillment of their Jewish national and spiritual destiny, which the Apostle Paul compared to resurrection (Rom. 11:15). (Note: Paul also deals at some length with the positive aspects of the polarization of Jews and Christians in terms of divine sovereignty over the historical process.)

## The Modern Era

Post-Reformation Christianity and the renewed emphasis on personal faith have significantly changed the relationship of the Church and Jewry. Certainly, movements like Restorationism (re-

emphasizing the place of the Jew, nationally and spiritually, in the divine scheme), positive Jewish evangelism and the wider evangelical movement have contributed to the revival of Hebrew Christianity as an identifiable element within the body of Christ. The changes in Jewish life wrought by Emancipation, Reform Judaism, Zionism and a pluralistic Jewish society were equally crucial in the revival of a Hebrew Christian movement.

### {47} A Triad: Survival, Evangelism, Hebrew Christianity

What are the immediate implications for the Church of the belief that the survival of the Jewish people has been and remains willed by God (Jer. 31:35-37; Rom. 11:29); that the Church is called to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy by its proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel (Rom. 10:19; 11:11, 14); and that the reconstitution of a Jewish-Christian remnant within the Jewish people and within the body of Christ is a biblical imperative (Rom. 11: 1-5)? Let us examine three elements concerning the Church's relationship with the Jews which make up an essential threefold challenge: Jewish survival, Jewish evangelism and Jewish Christianity.

*Jewish Survival.* Many have heard the well-known challenge of Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel, "Does the Church through its evangelistic outreach want to see a world in which there are no Jews?" Admittedly for Rabbi Heschel, the Jews he has in mind are linked to the Synagogue; though room exists for modified versions of traditional Judaism, none remains for a Judaism which accepts Jesus. Yet the plea and challenge are genuine. The evangelizing church has done little to quiet Jewish fears that it is indifferent to the issues of Jewish survival; or that the Church is not cooperating with those elements within the Jewish people who deliberately or carelessly exploit the Church for promoting their own total assimilation among the Gentiles.

A Jewish source recently noted, "it was conversion to Christianity, as well as to Islam, and not persecution, that has taken the highest toll of the Jewish population and made only a small percentage of the Jewish people survive *qua* Jews during the first millenium of our era" (Prof. Zvi Ankori of the Dept. of Jewish History, Tel Aviv University).

Even in the State of Israel, either through carelessness or indifference, the Church and its agencies have been used by "dropout" Jews to promote their assimilation into the Gentile world. In recent years some have adopted the extreme secularist view of stressing Israeli identity in opposition to a wider Jewish identity. This is part of a transparent attempt to avoid coping with the problems of Jewish and Jewish-Christian survival.

In the Diaspora countless Jews have found in the Church their "passport to Gentilization", to paraphrase the 19th century German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine. An evangelism or Jewish Christianity which is indifferent to Jewish survival must inevitably wither away. Modern experience bears this out. The issue of Jewish survival should therefore be a constant factor on the agenda of the believing church.

*Jewish Evangelism.* The second component of this triad, Jewish evangelism, is related to the issue of Jewish national and spiritual survival. Originally, that modern Jewish evangelism was closely related to Restorationism (that is, to a strong sense of impending national Jewish restoration). One of its logical developments was modern Hebrew {48} Christianity. The results have not always been what the pioneer evangelists and Hebrew Christians hoped for. Jewish

national restoration has not as yet led to a powerful Jewish Christian renewal in the homeland, although it has considerably revived Jewish Christianity in some parts of the Diaspora.

Modern Jewish evangelism has had notable achievements. Multitudes of Jews have come to a genuine faith in Christ and many of them have contributed greatly to the life of the whole Church, to the Hebrew Christian movement and to the Jewish people at large. Nevertheless, it is a painful fact that Jewish evangelism has often come to a standstill and been reduced to ministering to those Jews already on their way out of the Jewish community. In addition, much of modern Hebrew Christianity has been unable to sustain itself over long periods of time. These are issues which must be addressed.

*Jewish Christianity-Messianism.* The final component of this triad is probably the most sensitive, complex and therefore most challenging element. In the view of this writer, both as a result of personal experience and of historical reading, it seems that the older forms of Jewish/Hebrew Christianity have not generally been very successful in reproducing themselves or in creating strong and lasting frameworks.

Though past failures may be charged to the tensions and complexities of Jewish and Christian life in the Diaspora, we may wonder that no Hebrew Christian community has developed in the State of Israel even remotely comparable to the ancient Jewish Church in the Holy Land. Since there has been a significant national Jewish restoration, why not a significant parallel restoration among Jewish/Hebrew Christians?

It appears that our Diaspora brethren (primarily in the U.S. and Canada, but also in the U.K., France and Oceania) have been more forceful in challenging some of the basic concepts of the older Hebrew Christianity, which often could do little to stem the tide into total assimilation. Many of the “Messianic Jews” are more sensitive to the need to find effective solutions regarding problems and issues of Jewish survival, regarding the Jewish witness to Yeshua, and regarding the creation of a more committed and close-knit Jewish Christianity (or Jewish Messianism, as they would prefer it to be defined). Whatever the outcome of modern Hebrew Christianity (or Messianic Judaism), there can be no true fulfillment of Jewish evangelistic objectives and no adequate respect for the issues of Jewish national and spiritual survival until a viable and vital Messianic faith is dynamically functioning within the Jewish people, even if it must function largely “outside the camp.”

## End-Time Tensions

The Holocaust, the rebirth of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, the apocalyptic tensions which hover over the international scene and the alarms sounded by secular and religious heralds, are all combining to reinforce the ever-recurring biblical cry: “The End is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7; cf. Haggai 2:6; Joel 3:14). At the same time we are biblically obliged to balance one tension against the complementary tension: “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Meanwhile, we would do well to consider the counsel of one of the Rabbis in the Mishna: “If you are planting a tree and someone tells you the Messiah is come, first finish planting the tree.” The fact that the survival of the Jewish people is willed – indeed guaranteed – by the word of God does not relieve us of our responsibility to act on its behalf.

# {49} RESPONSE

by Jan Rantrud

*District Pastor*

*Immanuel Lutheran Church Yaffo*

to:

## "Jewish Survival"

What is the significance of Jewish survival for the church? One could also put the question this way: what does it mean for the self-understanding of the Christian church that the people of the Messiah, the Jews, do not recognize Him as such? How can a non-Jew call himself a Christian i.e. a subject of the King of the Jews, when the Jews themselves do not recognize this king's right to the throne? Is the very existence of the Jewish people today – even in the State of Israel – in *spite of* or *because of* their rejection of Jesus the Messiah?

Before reviewing the traditional Jewish and Christian answers to these questions or attempting to formulate fresh ones, one should reassess the basic preconceptions which define the above terms.

### A. The Church

Drawing on passages like Acts 13:46 and 18:6, some see the Christian church of today as the result of missions to the Gentiles only. The predominantly Jewish apostolic and early church, having rejected mainstream Judaism, was forced to give up preaching the Gospel to the Jewish people and instead turned to the Gentiles. As the latter soon outnumbered the former, the church after a few centuries became what it is today – a Gentile entity defined separately from the Jewish people. Consequently, according to this definition, a Christian is a Gentile.

### B. The Jewish People

Drawing on the concept of rabbinic succession as outlined in passages like Pirke Avoth 1:1 ff, modern rabbinic Judaism is seen by many as the continuation of Old Testament faith. It has survived as such by having rejected the Christian Gospel as an unacceptable innovation and/or deviation from its own historical roots. Judaism is thus the religion of the Jewish people as revealed to them in the Old Testament. Consequently, according to this definition, a Jew cannot be a Christian, and can only survive as a Jew by not converting to Christianity. A consequence of the above definitions is that a Jew who becomes a Christian (i.e. embraces faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah) thereby leaves his people and effectively becomes a Gentile.

From the Jewish side the attitude toward the Christian church has been that Christianity per se may be acceptable (if one disregards its nasty history of violent anti-semitic persecutions) but only {50} as a religion for Gentiles (cf. Micah 4:5). Judaism may go so far as to embrace a very positive view

of Jesus, seeing Him as perhaps Israel's light to the Gentiles, and it may welcome meaningful dialogue with the church. But it will always and invariably consider Christianity to be intrinsically non-Jewish, and it will immediately balk at the very thought of Jews converting to Christianity. It is important to bear in mind that much of the Jewish people's anti-Christian attitudes and expressions are the direct results of Christianity's long history of anti-semitism. However, even if the church had dealt decently with the Jews – if there had been no crusades, no inquisition, no pogroms, etc. – Judaism would still have resented conversion and mission. It remains a fundamental tenet that one of the reasons for the survival of the Jewish people as such is precisely *because of* that people's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

On the Christian side, their basic preconceptions have created a more complicated picture. The results may be outlined as follows:

*Theologically based anti-semitism:* The Jewish people's rejection of Jesus, it is postulated, has caused their rejection by God, and their place as God's people has been taken over by the Gentile church. Consequently the Jewish people's very existence is an affront to God Himself and to persecute them is to carry out the divine punishment. One can only comment that such a position totally disregards biblical passages like Romans 11: If.

*Theologically based anti-Judaism:* This is similar to the above concept but provides for the salvation of individual Jews from their Judaism; this is effected by their converting and being assimilated into the Gentile world. It remains a sad fact that either of the above attitudes may accurately be described as the traditional Christian attitude to Judaism.

Another set of attitudes, more fully in agreement with the Jewish position as outlined above, has gained ground in modern Protestant thought and more recently in Catholic circles as well. We may call it *theologically based indifference:* Judaism is a way of salvation in its own right. Converting Jewish people to Christianity is unnecessary, inappropriate and perhaps even theologically illegal. God has one way of dealing with the Church and another way of dealing with the Jewish people, and He Himself is keeping these two entities separate. In its raw form this conception can only be maintained by disregarding passages like Matt. 21:43 and Acts 4:12. Others, in the more eschatologically oriented Protestant denominations, see the Scriptures describing the salvation and conversion of the people of Israel as a future eschatological event. The Jews themselves will one day come to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah, or they will be instantly converted at His second coming. In both cases, this conversion will be quite independent of the evangelistic efforts of the Christian church, and it certainly will not result in Israel joining the church. According to this theological position, the church will have been lifted away in the Rapture before this conversion occurs. Much of the Christian Zionist movement holds views which correspond more or less to the above position.

Our above outline is an imperative prerequisite to discussing the theological implications of Jewish survival for the Christian church. The fault in Benhayim's article lies in the fact that it asks far too few questions. By not examining the question of the historical link between contemporary Jewry and biblical Israel, we may find ourselves overlooking a truly crucial problem. Given that physical and historical links exist, what can be said about the religious links? Even the history of the last 1900 years does not have the power to change the theology-**{51}** cal issues involved. An uncritical

affirmation of the religious link is tantamount to saying that contemporary and historic rabbinic Judaism remains the legitimate continuation of Old Testament faith. The implications of such a position are outlined above.

Benhayim's central point is that the survival of the Jewish people has been and remains willed by God. This is undoubtedly true, as the reference to Rom. 11:29 shows. Paul says the same in Romans 11:1 a, 2. But his main point and the one which topples the two basic conceptions A and B outlined above is the affirmation Paul makes in Rom. 11: 1b! The existence of Hebrew Christianity (or Messianic Judaism, if that term is preferable) is the point of departure for understanding Jewish survival and not the other way around. The very existence of Hebrew Christianity shows that God is still fully committed to the promises and covenants given to His people, because a part of that people still *does* believe in Him. Hebrew Christians thereby sanctify the unbelieving majority of that people. The above Scripture also shows that a Christian certainly does not have to be a Gentile and that faith in Messiah implies no severance from the Jewish people. This is precisely the theme which resounds throughout Rom. 11:1-6. It also makes it impossible to speak of a solely Gentile church. Rom. 11:5 holds true today as well, perhaps more than ever, and backs up the picture of the church given in Ephesians 2:2 – God's people made up of saved Jews and Gentiles – the first being so by gracious birthright, the second by gracious adoption.

The emergence of Hebrew Christianity as a recognizable branch of the Church in the latter half of this century has, together with the establishment of the State of Israel, caused a considerable reorientation vis-à-vis Jewish people in Protestant churches. Originally the Reformation and the Pietist awakening had revitalized a drive to evangelize the Jewish people – Jewish missions became part of the world-embracing Protestant missionary movement. The motivation was a simple (but far from naive) faith that, since only the Gospel could bring salvation to all men, the Jewish people were to be included as worthy hearers of that message. A re-orientation came in this century with the gradual appreciation of the fact that the Jews were not just another missionary object, but rather part and parcel of the people who were the first believers in Christ. The presence of Messianic Jews has caused and is still causing Protestant churches engaged in Jewish evangelism to take a long hard look at their own "Gentilization" of the gospel and gradually to appreciate the indigenous development of a distinct Hebrew/Jewish form of Christianity. This process is still an ongoing one. The very recent "Statement about Christian Ministry to the Jewish People" by the national board of directors of the Norwegian Mission to Israel breaks new ground in the Lutheran context. It announces in many areas a retracing of steps and a turning away from earlier practice, soundly refuting the "The Church is the new Israel" doctrine. It acknowledges the Jewish people's ownership of the land of Israel, {52} their special relationship to the Torah and the desirability of encouraging a distinct Jewish identity both in congregations and among individuals.

This latter point is still an unsolved problem. A definition of Jewish identity is as uncertain as is the whole question, "Who is a Jew". Maybe Hebrew Christianity alone can provide the answer, with perhaps Rom. 2:29 being the guideline. Furthermore, perhaps only Hebrew Christianity in Israel will develop a true Israeli Jewish identity. Rabbinic Judaism cannot. The planting of Diaspora Judaism in Eretz Israel is just that. It is a sobering experience to read of Rabbi Elias Schwartz discussing with the chief Rabbi of Safed the merits of living in America and Israel respectively. The prevailing argument states that only in Israel can truly genuine European synagogues and yeshivot be built! The same basic concept remains widespread in Messianic

Jewish circles in Israel. “Only in Israel can one build fellowships and assemblies free from the traditions of the established churches” – in other words, only in Israel can the principles of the European Reformation be truly implemented! Would that Benhayim had not relegated “stressing Israeli identity in opposition to a Jewish (religious) identity” to the ash heap of the “extreme secularist Israeli view”. There are directions worth following here which are anything but secularist!

Finally, Benhayim’s triad of survival, evangelism and Hebrew Christianity points toward a reassessment of time-honored practices, a raising of questions which must be dealt with. He does touch many a raw nerve, and some representatives of Jewish evangelistic organizations or expatriate churches in Israel might find themselves standing in need of correction when confronted with the issues he raises. Instead of walking down every path opened up by his triad, we will only suggest a few of the directions along which future theological work will have to move:

The evident existence of the abovementioned triad shows that the popular view (that of the early church’s abandoning Jewish evangelism and *replacing* it with Gentile evangelism) is utterly false! Acts 13:46 is followed by 14:1ff *even today!* In the same way Acts 18:8a follows 18:6!

Rom. 11:1 is proven true *both* by the rest of the chapter *and* by what we see today.

Furthermore, we may soon literally be confronted with the eschatological aspects involved. No words of Jesus have been proven more tangibly or even brutally true than Matt. 23:39. With the emergence and growth of Hebrew Christianity in Eretz Israel, the corollary of Jesus’ words may soon also come true before our very eyes.

# {53} “To The Jew First”

Statement About Christian Ministry to the Jewish People from the National Board of Directors, the Norwegian Mission to Israel (February 1986)

*The Norwegian Mission to Israel (DNI) was established in 1844. In 1861 it was organized as a national Norwegian organization under the leadership of professor Carl Paul Caspari, a Hebrew Christian who came to faith in Jesus while studying in Leipzig. From 1847 onward he was lecturer in Old Testament at the University of Oslo.*

*Up till 1891 DNI supported English and German missions among Jewish people in Palestine and Eastern Europe. From 1891 until the communist takeover in 1948, DNI also had a ministry among Jews in Romania and Hungary. Since 1948 its main ministry has been congregational work in Haifa and Tel Aviv. The Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish studies in Jerusalem was established by DNI in 1982.*

## Introduction

Through this statement, the Norwegian Mission to Israel wishes to establish the theological basis for its work and to set out the aims it seeks to realize. It might be useful to begin by saying a few words about the Mission’s traditional name: The Norwegian Mission to Israel. Today, the name “Israel” is associated first and foremost with the country and government of Israel. As a result, people associate our traditional name with the mission work we do in the country of Israel. However, this is not the original meaning of the term “mission to Israel”. “Israel” refers to the Jewish people wherever they reside. And since “Israel” is the Bible’s own title of honor for the Jewish people, this statement will use that term in the same way.

The word “mission” is considered by many to be a loaded word, partly because it brings to mind European feelings of superiority over Third World “primitives”. Since such connotations are often tied to the concept of “mission”, it is particularly hard to use that term in ministering to the Jewish people. However, the term is so incorporated in our language that it is difficult to omit it. The same holds true for the term “mission to the Gentiles”, although in daily use, the term is often construed to be disparaging. In this statement, the term “Gentile” will be employed solely in the sense of “non-Jews”. It is so used in our older Bible translations. It should be emphasized that the word “mission” is a positive word which expresses a biblical concern; to be a missionary means to be sent to preach about God’s act of salvation through Jesus Christ; and the mission to Israel is to preach this salvation to the Jewish people.

{54} Is a theological statement on the platform and goals of the Norwegian Mission to Israel necessary now? Among the great majority of Norway’s Christian population, mission to Israel has been considered an obvious duty for the Christian congregation. It has been considered obvious that:

*- Salvation is found only through Jesus; this gospel must be shared with all people, including the Jewish people.*



*- The Great Commission has a two-fold thrust: it is given to all believers, and these shall go to all people, including the Jewish people.*

Today, however, many Jews and Christians question both of these premises. It would be unwise to brush away the objections which they have raised without first examining them. The time is perhaps ripe for a restatement of our mandate and our goals.

Objection to a Christian witnessing ministry among the Jewish people is partly historical, partly theological, and partly political. Of the historical arguments, two are frequently expressed:

*- If missions to the Jewish people succeed, the result will be the assimilation and dissolution of the Jewish people.*

*- The Church's persecution of the Jews has made the former an unfit and untrustworthy vehicle for witnessing to the Jewish people.* Theologically, the arguments tend to run as follows:

*- History shows that Jesus had a mission to the Gentiles as their Savior, but He could not have been Israel's Messiah, as He did not usher in the Messianic Age.*

*- The New Testament knows of no mandate given to the Gentile Christians commanding them to witness to the Jewish people; the Great Commission was given to Jesus' **Jewish** disciples and only concerns ministry to the Gentles.*

*- Israel will be converted independently of the Church and in God's time at the Second Coming of Christ.*

*- The Abrahamic covenant is not broken and still applies to the physical descendants of Israel. This covenant is all that Israel needs and no new covenant is necessary.*

*- The Christian creed is tainted by Hellenism and thus abhorrent to Jewish people.*

The political arguments against the mission to Israel differ from those mentioned above and seldom appear explicitly formulated. However, anti-Zionism takes a negative attitude to Jewish evangelism because one assumes that the mission to Israel must necessarily imply political support of the Israeli government.

These are some of the objections raised against ministry to the Jewish people today. The purpose of this statement is not, however, to discuss each of these points in detail. It is more important to give a positive presentation of the foundation upon which our missionary society is built: this will take place in constant dialogue with the more recent objections to the mission to Israel.

## **{55} I. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE MISSION**

### **1. Salvation through Jesus**

a) Jesus recognized Himself as the one who fulfilled the promises in the Old Testament and brought about the time of redemption and the rewards of salvation. His disciples also believed and understood Him to be so. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him" (2. Cor. 1:20). At the

same time, the New Testament teaches that the kingdom of God has not yet come about. There remains a “sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). Christians are therefore awaiting the return of Jesus, “whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old” (Acts 3:21). Christians confidently confess Christ as the Messiah, Israel’s Messiah and Savior of man.

b) Since Jesus fulfills the promises, there is no redemption in these promises without Him. But all God’s promises have found their Yes in Him. Therefore, the New Testament can, on the one hand, emphatically affirm God’s promises and gifts to Israel: “They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (Rom. 9:4). But just as emphatically, it is stressed that the redemption which the promises and gifts from God to His chosen people Israel foretold, are now found in Jesus and Jesus alone. “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). It was in direct confrontation with the Jewish people’s highest religious leaders that the disciples spoke these words.

## **2. Ministering**

a) First and foremost, Jesus’ Messianic commission concerned Israel, the Jewish people, because Israel’s salvation is central to all of God’s promises of salvation. Jesus’ disciples, as well, were first of all sent to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6). The apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, confirms Israel’s precedence; the gospel is “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16). The good news that Jesus died for us and victoriously rose again from the dead is to be preached to the Jews and to them first; this was throughout the New Testament a matter of course which was never questioned. The problem was, however, whether the Gentiles could also partake in that salvation and be incorporated into God’s family without becoming Jews through circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law.

The idea that Jesus came as the Savior of all people but was not Israel’s Messiah, does not exist in the New Testament.

b) After His resurrection, Jesus extended the commission of His disciples: they would now also go to the Gentiles. This in no way annulled their continued commission to Israel (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47). Even the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, first sought out the synagogue when he came to a new place. He apparently felt he had no right to go to the local Gentiles with the gospel before the Jews in the synagogue had heard it and believed it – or rejected it (Acts 13:46; Rom. 11:15). It should be emphasized that Acts does not portray the Jewish people as uniformly rejecting the gospel. On the contrary, many Jews embraced it and came to be the core of the developing congregations in the Diaspora.

c) Through faith in Jesus, the Gentiles were incorporated into God’s people; they became “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19); they were no longer “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the {56} covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12). The unity of this Messianic people of God, Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus, is emphasized very strongly in the New Testament, especially because agreement between Jews and Gentiles was difficult, not least due to the Jewish laws of purification. The metaphorical phrases which describe God’s chosen people underline this unity: the true vine (John 15:1-6), the rich olive

tree (Rom. 11:16-21), one holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21), the one body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-5). Nowhere is there mention of two trees, two temples, two bodies of Christ. Christ is to “reconcile us both (Jews and Gentiles) to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Eph. 2:16).

d) The task of preaching the gospel to Israel and all peoples is given to the Christian Church as a whole, as its collective assignment. When Paul in Ephesians 4 speaks of the building up of the body of Christ, of the work of and equipping for the ministry, he also speaks of the body’s unity. Unity is the point of departure. “There is one body and one spirit... one lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Eph. 4:4). And unity is the goal: Christ has designated the work areas of the church, including the evangelists, “... for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God...” (Eph. 4:12-13).

For obvious historical reasons the first evangelists and missionaries were Jews, preaching to both Jews and non-Jews. But in time Gentile believers also joined the apostles in their ministry (Col. 4:10-14), and nowhere does the New Testament suggest that they should on principle be excluded from participating in preaching to the Jews. On the contrary-Acts, for example, shows that the non-Jew Luke took part in Paul’s ministry in the synagogue. This is the natural consequence of applying the crucial concept about the unity of the congregation in missionary work as well.

These observations notwithstanding, there are many reasons why it is more “natural” for countrymen to preach to countrymen. This pertains to all ministries, and it is valid for witnessing to Jewish people as well. Hence the Jewish followers of Christ have always been the preferred evangelists in Christian missions to the Jews. This must still be the case: the aim of the mission to Israel is to help build congregations of Jewish Christians and to support them in their missionary work among their kinsmen.

e) In general it must be maintained that there is a close connection between one’s vision of ministry to the Jewish people and one’s vision of the Church. If one defines the Church as consisting only of non-Jews, one can either reject the mission to the Jewish people on the grounds that the Jews have no place in the Church, or on the grounds that Gentiles have no mandate to preach to Israel. But if one defines the Church in the New Testament way, consisting of believers who are Jews and Gentiles, it becomes meaningless to say that the Church has no mandate to minister to the Jews. Thus the one Church has this one mandate: to preach the gospel of Israel’s Messiah and the Savior of man to all peoples – first to the Jewish people and then to the Gentiles.

f) There exist certain ideas about the conversion and salvation of Israel that seem to render superfluous missionary work to the Jewish people. For instance, some envision that {57} Israel will collectively turn to Christ at the Second Coming, or that God through dramatic historical events will lead His people to faith and salvation. In this regard, there are two points to be made. First, if one presupposes both conditions to be true, we are nevertheless not relieved of our obligation to preach the gospel. God can lead people to faith in Him through His own means, independently of us, both in missions to the Gentiles and in missions to Israel; but that does not mean that our responsibility to witness is removed. Second, the idea of a spontaneous conversion at the Second Coming, caused by the Coming itself and independent of evangelizing, in our opinion lacks any

foundation in the New Testament. The prominent thought in the New Testament appears to be that the Second Coming of Christ will reveal what faith or unbelief already dwells in the heart of man, but not that the Coming, as such, precipitates a redemptive faith. On the contrary, a number of New Testament passages emphasize the fact that one must be prepared for the coming of the Lord, because it will then be too late to repent and believe (Matt. 25:1-13). According to the New Testament, redemptive belief is not the result of the Second Coming, but of proclaiming the Lord who came and who will come again. This is also true of Paul's well-known words about the conversion of Israel in Romans 11:25ff. Here, Paul says that the Jewish nation will be saved when "the full number of the Gentiles come in." For Israel, too, faith is necessary for salvation: they shall be grafted back onto the tree of Israel "if they do not persist in their unbelief" (Rom. 11:23, cp. vv. 14, 23). It is *Israel* that Paul talks about in the well-known passage in Romans 10, where he stresses the fact that belief comes from *hearing* the gospel: "But how are men (the Jewish people) to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). These words also pertain to the teaching about the Jewish people's conversion at the Second Coming. In addition, it must be noted that Israel's conversion and salvation *as a people* is a mystery. Paul's comments are specifically addressed to us Christians who are descendants of Gentiles, in order that we not become conceited.

## II. RELEVANT THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

### 1. The Church and Israel

a) A strong theological tradition in the Church has depicted the Church as "the new Israel" in a way not in accordance with the New Testament. The argument was that the Church *replaces* the Jews as God's chosen people, with the unexpressed condition that the Church consist of non-Jews; the Jews collectively rejected Jesus, consequently they have ended up in a blind alley as far as salvation goes. The New Testament's most extensive discussion of this issue is found in Romans 9-11. Paul makes it plain that the question of Israel's salvation in essence amounts to a question of God's trustworthiness. God could never forsake Israel without reneging on His own promises. And He has never done so. Therefore, God will never desert or divorce Israel and replace her with the Church. First, part of Israel has always believed in Jesus. Paul calls them the living branches on the tree of Israel. With them as an example, Paul shows that God continues to recognize them as the people of promise. The Gentile believers do not comprise a new, independent people alongside Israel, but are grafted onto the tree as "a wild shoot", thereby sharing Israel's promises and privileges. Secondly, God has not abandoned the branches which have been cut off. He has the power to graft them in again. This means that God leads and preserves these, His own people, in a special way. They have not lost their unique place in God's plan of salvation.

{58} According to Paul, both arguments must lead to Gentile Christians regarding Israel with humility: we Gentiles have been adopted as fellow-citizens "contrary to nature", while Israel has a "natural" right to salvation due to God's promises.

b) This means that there is a great difference between the mission to Israel and the mission to the Gentiles. When the Church approaches the Gentiles, it speaks to those "alienated", "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12ff). When the Church approaches the Jewish

people, it speaks to those who have “much in every way” and “are entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:1-2), who have all the privileges Paul mentions in Romans 9:4f: the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises and the patriarchs. A just ministry to Israel can only occur with a humble recognition of these privileges and preferences.

Therefore, we find it an important task to awaken the Christian’s consciousness of a gratitude for the Jewish heritage and the Jewish roots from which the Church has sprung. We find it completely natural that Christians should recognize and rejoice at the establishment of a Jewish government in the land of the Jewish heritage. At the same time, we realize the difficulty, practically a human impossibility in today’s situation, for our Arabic Christian brothers in and around the country of Israel to share in this recognition and rejoicing. In this area, we need continual communication and dialogue, so that we might at least understand and respect one another. Within Europe, the general feeling is that it is more important than ever that both the Church and individual Christians stay in the forefront of the battle against all forms of anti-Semitism, including the one manifesting itself through the denial of Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish nation.

Throughout the Old Testament, Israel’s land and people are bound together: God’s judgment means expulsion and exile; God’s salvation and blessing mean a return to the land and a beginning of a new life. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself presupposes this same line of thought (Luke 21:20-24). The partial return of the Jews to the country of Israel may then be seen as part of God’s historical plan, despite the impossibility of this plan being fully revealed or traced out. We believe that the connection between Israel’s people and the country of Israel belongs to the “mystery” which Paul, in Romans 11, asks the Gentile Christians to revere, without making us insensitive to the injustices and attacks which some of the parties in the area suffer.

## **2. Israel and the Law**

a) The first disciples were all Jews. We know both from the New Testament and from other sources that many of their countrymen regarded them as pious, law-abiding Jews. Christ’s brother, James, was widely known among his countrymen as “the just one.” Meanwhile, available sources show that the law-abiding Christians of Jewish descent did not accept without question the rabbis’ interpretation of the Law, especially after the reconstruction of Pharisaic Judaism in 70 A.D., after the destruction of the temple.

b) No longer did the Jewish believers in Jesus regard the rabbis as the highest authority in questions of the Law, but this place was filled by Messiah Jesus. “You have heard it was said to the men of old.... but I say to you...” At the same time, the Law received a new place and function in their faith and lives different from the function it had in rabbinic {59} Judaism. As long as the temple stood, burnt offerings were the means of obtaining atonement for the sins of Israel. When the temple fell, the rabbis developed a teaching that substituted repentance and good works for offerings. To each pious Israelite, living according to the Law became a means of atonement and forgiveness. Many indications point to this tendency developing already several decades before the fall of the temple. But for the Jewish believers in the Messiah, it was quite different. Jesus’ atoning death was their substitution for the temple offerings; it was in Jesus, not the Law, that the problem of forgiveness was solved. “Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38). Hence, the Law now held a different meaning for Jewish Christians’ faith and practice than it did for rabbinic Judaism. For the latter, to live by the

Law was less a means of atonement and salvation than a matter of loyalty to Israel and the God of Israel. They continued to see themselves as good Jews, as Israelites who had been included in the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. The fact that they continued to keep the commandments God had given to Israel, must have been a matter of course for most of them. Only where the offering laws were concerned did they find themselves in a completely new situation.

c) To many Christian Jews, the situation today appears the same. They often speak of the "fulfillment" or "completion" of their Jewish identity: when they came to believe in Jesus, they became better Jews. It was a new situation in which the disciples found themselves after Christ's death and resurrection, dramatically highlighted by the question of whether or not Gentiles could partake of Christ's salvation without becoming Jews and following the Mosaic Law. If one answered in the affirmative, it was tantamount to saying that salvation was to be found in Jesus and in Him alone, not in the Law. The earliest congregations, led by Peter and James, answered affirmatively (Acts 11 and 15). Later, Paul clarified all the theological consequences of this decision in his letters to the Galatians and Romans.

d) The consequences of this new view of the salvation is most vividly demonstrated in Paul. Among law-abiding Jews, Paul behaves as a law abiding Jew (Acts 16:3; 21:20-26; 1 Cor. 9:20), but on the mission field among the Gentiles, Paul disregards the instructions of the Law which would have isolated him as a Jew from the Gentiles, not least because of the laws for eating and purification (Gal. 2:11-16). Peter was led by the Spirit to do something similar (Acts 10). The Law was not a means of salvation; in Christ, there was as much freedom to continue a Jewish life according to the Mosaic Law, as to have a non-Jewish one independent of the Law. In acknowledgement of that freedom, both those who lived by the Law and those who did not announced Jesus alone as God's salvation for Jews and Greeks. Yet Paul makes it clear that the result is not contempt for the Law. Only those bound to Christ are free from the Law, and through Christ are given the Spirit which fulfills the just requirement of the Law (Rom. 8:1-4). The apostles' bold exhortative ministry provides our evangelical tradition with an ideal to strive for. In ministry to the Jewish people weaknesses concerning this point become very obvious.

e) Rabbinic Judaism after 70 A.D. is not identical to the Judaism of Jesus and the first disciples. This must be a consideration when deciding how Christian Jews of today should maintain a Jewish identity.

Judaism at the time of Christ was a complex entity, which housed distinctively different parties and tendencies: Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots and others we only know by name. None of these could claim a monopoly on Judaism, nor did any deny the Christian Jews their Judaism when they emerged as a new Jewish religious faction after 30 A.D.

{60} But after the Jewish-Roman conflict and the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., most of these factions disappeared. Only two groups survived the catastrophe – the Pharisaic-Rabbinic and the Christian-Jewish. The Pharisaic tradition eventually established itself as the only legitimate Judaism, while the Christian church became more structured and delimited itself from rabbinic Judaism. It is therefore not completely accurate to call Christianity the religious "daughter" of Judaism, if one means rabbinic Judaism. It is more fitting to say that Judaism and Christianity are "sister" religions, having the same "mother" in pre-70 AD. Judaism.

The rabbinic tradition incorporates several elements which are negatively disposed towards Jesus as Messiah and to Christian belief in Him. At the same time, it also contains important elements which date back to the time of Jesus and which, for one wanting to remain Jewish, are natural to identify with. There is much work waiting to be done in this area for the Christian Jew, though it is impossible to prescribe blanket solutions.

However, an unconditional acceptance of rabbinic tradition cannot be considered. Even Paul withdrew and took the disciples with him “from the synagogue” (Acts 19:9). Today, when it is argued that Christian Jews should not join a Christian congregation but instead stay in the synagogue, one has overlooked not only its implicit negativism toward the Messiah Jesus, but also the practical denial of the unity of Christ’s body.

### **3. “Hellenizing” the Church**

It is often asserted that the Church’s confession of faith is so marked by the Grecian focus on the nature of being, that it is impossible for a Jew to understand or accept it; he is more interested in the actions of God than a descriptive statement of the nature of God.

This, however, is a greatly simplified presentation of a very complex situation. It is true that Christianity was strongly influenced by its meeting with the Hellenistic culture of antiquity, but one often forgets that the same holds true for Judaism. Many Hellenistic elements in Christianity were passed on through Greek-speaking adherents of Judaism, and so the Judaism of the country of Israel was also deeply affected by its meeting with Hellenistic culture.

This does not mean that Judaism and Christianity became “Hellenized” in the sense that their central truths were abandoned. To the Church, the temptation might have been logical for it to renounce its confession of the Son of God suffering and dying; Hellenism was convinced that God could not suffer, much less descend to the level of man. In Arianism, the problem was solved by declaring the Son to be not “true God” The Nicene Creed, however, maintains that Jesus was true God, even in His sufferings. Here the Biblical concept of God is adhered to, in spite of its offensiveness to the Greek ear.

Confession of the deity of Jesus is also found with the earliest Christian Jews, both within and subsequent to the New Testament. This confession must always be adhered to in substance, if the Christian confession is to be full-bodied and biblical. It had already been stressed in the Primitive Church that rhetoric was not crucial; what was and is crucial is the confession’s biblical substance, which we find well expressed in the Nicene Creed.

## **{61} III. HISTORICAL MISTAKES AND HISTORICAL MODELS**

a) The apostles maintained that it was not necessary for Gentile Christians to become Jews (through circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law) in order to receive salvation. Later, the (predominantly) Gentile Christian church turned the matter upside down by requiring the faithful to cease being Jews in order to become Christians. Hence, keeping the Law of Moses was seen to be incompatible with one’s Christian confession. This, in turn, served to strengthen the Jewish understanding of Christianity as being un-Jewish or even anti-Jewish.

b) Paul's vision of Gentile Christians as "wild shoots" grafted onto the trunk of the natural olive tree was soon forgotten or abandoned and, instead, one referred to the Gentile Christian church as the new Israel who had replaced the old Israel.

c) At the same time, the Church developed a teaching about two types of people: Gentiles, who by nature find it easy to believe the gospel, and Jews, who in a special way, are faithless and hardened.

d) This was combined with the idea that the Jews were in a special way guilty of Christ's crucifixion, and many theologians have expressed the opinion that in committing this "murder of God", the Jews are guilty of an unforgivable sin which will haunt them till the end of time.

In our day and age, it is imperative to stress that all of these opinions must be regarded as wrong, harmful and dangerous; dangerous because they have become the basis for ecclesiastical and popular anti-Semitism; harmful because they lead to a triumphant arrogance on the part of the Church; and wrong because they are at odds with the central assertions of the New Testament.

The opinions referred to in points a) – d) above, have resulted in the view among the Jews that those Jews who became Christians were traitors to their people, and that mission to the Jews, if successful, would mean the end of the Jewish people. Even Christian Jews of today are subject to such accusations and misconceptions, and the Church's historical guilt is plain to see.

In general, there is much truth in the allegations that the Church has made itself into an unreliable witness about salvation through Jesus. If this were taken as the point of departure, the Church should not conduct mission work among the Jews or, indeed, any missionary work at all. But the Church has never preached the gospel by virtue of its history, but rather by virtue of the commission from Jesus and the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior that all people need.

The corrective to the above-mentioned misconceptions of the Church is found in the New Testament:

a) Jewish people who believed in Jesus did not cease to be Jews. They continued to keep the Mosaic Law and to identify with their people; as Jews, this was second nature to them. Their newfound freedom in Christ was evidenced when, for the sake of the gospel, they shared meals with Gentiles and associated with them.

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b) In the congregations where Jews and Gentiles lived in close contact, Gentile Christians were directed to be considerate of their Jewish brothers in Christ. Gentile Christians in such congregations were admonished to keep the eating instructions of the Law which were imposed on Gentiles living among Israelites (Acts 15). Thus, table fellowship with Gentiles was made possible for Christian Jews who followed the Mosaic Law.

c) Just as decidedly as the New Testament rejects keeping the Law as necessary for salvation, it rejects the idea that Jews have to abstain from keeping the Mosaic Law in order to be saved (e.g.



Acts 21:20-24;1 Cor. 9:20). Brotherly love among the Disciples of Christ is the overriding principle here and each is free to follow his own convictions.

d) In light of this, we would like to encourage and support the attempts of Christian Jews today to maintain and develop a Jewish identity. This must coincide with retaining the fellowship and unity of the Church, which is attested to in the New Testament. An isolated congregation of Christian Jews which sequesters itself from the non-Jewish limbs of the body of Christ, defies innumerable directives in the New Testament.

Through this statement, the National Board of Directors of *DNI* would like to point out some of the most important theological and historical guidelines for directing the work of our organization. We do not see this statement to be a new one as it regards our own tradition. Historically, the German pietists who pioneered missions to Israel also argued for a new and positive appraisal of Israel and its role in the history of salvation, an appraisal which broke with much of the Church's traditional anti-Judaism. We wish to point out that a new rededication to Jewish missions historically coincided with the development of a new love for and a new feeling of kinship with the Jewish people.

#### IV. OUR CURRENT GOALS

The Norwegian Mission to Israel's overriding goals are to preach the gospel to the Jewish people and to incorporate those Jews who accept Christ as their Savior into the body of Christ through baptism. In our work among the more than 3 million Jews in the country of Israel, our goal is to help establish congregations which predominantly consist of Christian Jews. It is only natural that such believers have Hebrew as their main language, and that they integrate into their worship, services and holidays those elements of the Jewish traditions which they find appropriate.

In our work with the over 11 million Jews outside the country of Israel, we also work toward helping Jewish people who accept Christ find their identity as Jewish Christians, whether they establish congregations which consist predominantly of Jews, or whether they find fellowship with existing congregations of non-Jewish Christians. This is reminiscent of the primitive Church: predominantly Jewish congregations within the country of Israel, and mixed congregations in the Diaspora. Our challenge, therefore, is also to help non-Jewish Christians become aware of the accommodations and considerations they should make out of brotherly love. It would also be natural for Jewish believers in predominantly Gentile churches or congregations to cooperate in finding holidays and other occasions that mark their Jewish identity.

{63} As with all missions, the mission to Israel's goal is to make itself unnecessary. Our goal is independent, self-sufficient and self-evangelizing congregations and groups. In other words, the mission to Israel must also be subject to the dynamics of true mission work: the need to reach those not yet reached, the desire to plant the gospel where it has not yet been heard. It can no longer be guaranteed that a person living in the so-called "Christian" world has heard the gospel.

Concerning the Christian Church at home and abroad, we find it of the utmost importance to constantly remind the Church of its Jewish roots, and to give special attention to the following factors:

a) The Old Testament is the true word of God, given to us through Israel, confirmed and interpreted by Jesus and the apostles. A downgrading of the Old Testament often coincides with a downgrading of the Jewish people and of Judaism.

b) Jesus and His first disciples were Jews. They cannot be properly understood without the backdrop of Second Temple Judaism.

c) Israel is chosen for salvation and “beloved for the sake of their forefathers” (Rom. 11:28). This means that the priority of bringing the gospel to them, the message of salvation, still exists (Rom. 1:16).

d) Many stern judgments, both in the Old and the New Testament, have been spoken against Israel by prophets and apostles who themselves were Jews, and who shared their people’s destiny. We believers of Gentile descent should first direct these words toward ourselves. Passing arrogant judgment on Israel is incompatible with Paul’s directives in Rom. 11:18ff. If history has made a certain aspect of ministry impossible, it is the traditional judgmental preaching of the Church – not its preaching of salvation through Christ.

## V. HASTEN TO DO THE BIDDING OF THE KING

In this statement, an attempt has been made to clarify how the preaching of the gospel to Israel raises unique questions and unique challenges. The mission to Israel is in principle different from the mission to the Gentiles; Israel can rightfully claim privileges and prerogatives given to them in God’s promises. Hence, before all others, Israel must receive the gospel message.

The work of spreading the gospel is urgent! In the New Testament, mission is placed in a wider perspective: the gospel is to be preached to all peoples until the end comes (Matt. 24:14; 28:20). The parable of the talents emphasizes the responsibility which Christian congregations have to spread the good news so that all peoples might hear it! “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). But this task is also a joy and a privilege, for the gospel is a redeeming message. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, to the Jew first...” (Rom. 1:16).

# {64} Knit Together – Evangelical Cooperation in Israel

*Menachem Benhayim*

*For many years there have been attempts to bridge the gaps existing between the diverse groups of Evangelical Israeli believers in Jesus. This article will focus on Jewish believers in Israel, and on those related to them through ministry and support.*

## Of Days Gone By

For at least 120 years prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, there was an evangelical ministry in the Holy Land, particularly among the Jewish people. Unfortunately, virtually nothing remained of the pre-State work, no community of believers ready to cope with the reality of a sovereign Jewish state. Buildings, organizations and societies remained, but a healthy and well-rooted community bound up with the Land of Israel barely existed. It may be that 1948 was a divine opportunity providing a fresh start for Jewish believers and their friends; at the same time it reflected the failure of the Church to foresee and prepare for the prophetic return of Jewish sovereignty to its ancestral homeland.

During the early years of Israeli statehood there were attempts to create new cooperative frameworks or to revitalize old ones, such as the International Hebrew-Christian Alliance (I.H.C.A). There were those who sought to recreate, in spirit if not in form, the ancient “church of the circumcision” within the reborn Jewish homeland. Some even sought recognition from the Israeli authorities for a reconstituted messianic community. These early efforts failed to achieve both internal unity and external recognition either from Jewish society or from the wider universal church.

## The United Christian Council in Israel

A certain measure of cooperation among denominational streams and mission societies did arise, even where cultural and linguistic differences prevailed, so that among the Lutherans, for example, Norwegians, Finns, Romanians and Germans have been found cooperating {65} extensively. This has been true to a greater or lesser extent among other denominational groups working in the country. With the establishment of the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI) in 1956, a cooperative venture was launched, embracing Evangelical missionary organizations and Protestant churches working among Jews, Arabs and expatriates.

One major factor working against the greater effectiveness of the UCCI has been the Arab-Israeli conflict, creating tension among member bodies. This is understandable, since the member-bodies minister to communities which often take radically differing theological and political views of the

conflict's nature and resolution. Other obstacles standing in the way of greater cooperation are the differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Arab and Hebrew Christians.

In both communities strong reservations also exist regarding identification with foreign bodies or with their representatives. In addition, some local believers are critical of broad cooperative efforts which seem to blur doctrinal and practical differences which they perceive as crucial to their own identity. Thus, differing views on eschatology, ecumenism or evangelism which might be tolerated in a less defensive atmosphere, become causes for separation in a threatened minority community.

It is clear that within the UCCI there exist radically differing views on issues central to the biblical message: the nature and outworking of salvation is at times related to diverse political concepts, at times completely divorced from any political understanding. Christianity in the Middle East is sometimes perceived by its adherents to be primarily, if not exclusively, a matter of personal faith, one requiring a severing of ties with the traditional religious communities; others seek out those traditional communities and attempt to foster a measure of integration with them.

## Practical Achievements

On the practical level the UCCI has nevertheless had an impact on the believing community. It has financed and produced Christian literature in English, Hebrew and Arabic; it has provided aid to local students pursuing theological or vocational training; it has organized non-partisan seminars, conferences and national meetings; and it has fostered cooperation among Christian groups in resisting anti-Christian manifestations in Israel, at times with the cooperation of non-Christian Jewish bodies. This latter activity has been carried out by means of information gathering and media contacts, and by concerted appeals to public and private bodies and officials. The most successful efforts of the UCCI in the field of public relations was doubtless its 1977-78 campaign against the anti-mission legislation enacted by the Knesset; this law was pushed through the Knesset based on a distorted picture of Jewish evangelism promulgated by extremists in the Orthodox Jewish camp.

While the UCCI has remained for the most part a field of operation for expatriate workers, it enjoys a respectable authority in the eyes of the Israeli powers that be. They view it not so much as the representative of the several thousand Evangelical Christians who live in Israel (a very tiny portion of the Israeli Gentile minority), but rather as a point of contact with the multitudes of Evangelical and mainline Protestant Christians in the Western world, many of which are Israel's influential friends. Responsible Israeli officials are reticent to provoke these friends by untoward actions to the latter's spiritual compatriots in the Holy Land. Indeed, the aim of the Israeli authorities is to cultivate these peoples' support in order to strengthen the Israeli position in a world where Israel has no surplus of friends.

## {66} Indigenous Developments

A quarter of a century ago (about the time this writer arrived in Israel), one's general impression of the local Messianic Jewish<sup>1</sup> community was that it was composed of a small group of several hundred diverse members, mainly immigrants from the many lands of the Jewish Diaspora; in this

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Messianic Jewish" ("yehudi meshihi") is here used in its broadest sense and in its Israeli context, where the term is the preferred Hebrew designation among Jewish Israelis of Evangelical orientation.

respect they were not greatly different from the majority of Jewish Israelis at that time. There was also a small component of indigenous native Israeli believers who were children of local believing families. At one small meeting of some 30 persons in Haifa, the writer remembers counting seven languages in use – three from the platform consecutively, and four in simultaneous language-clusters scattered about the hall.

In the early 1960's Rachmiel and Esther Frydland, both Holocaust survivors, operated out of the Haifa offices of the I.H.C.A. They worked assiduously to unite the diverse elements within the Jewish community of believers, which were estimated at the time to be some 300. There was also some contact, mainly at a leadership level, with the small community of Hebrew-speaking Catholics.

## Lausanne Congress

In 1974 three Jewish believers and one Arab believer were invited to take part in a congress on world evangelism held in Lausanne, Switzerland, alongside participants from 150 countries. As a result of discussion workshops, the Jewish believers decided to organize a national conference of Hebrew-speaking believers in Israel in order to discuss practical and theoretical matters of concern related to evangelism, Jewish identity and cooperative endeavors. These conferences (and meetings between conferences) continued for some four years, but eventually came to a stop as some of the participating groups and individuals lost interest or took exception to the nature and scope of the national framework. Among the factors which proved controversial were the issues of the participation – or nonparticipation – of Roman Catholics, Gentile expatriates, charismatics, denominational representatives and adherents of “Messianic Judaism” (in its narrower sense describing those with a strong affinity to Jewish or Rabbinic tradition). There were also sharp theological and personal disputes among several members of the organizing committee. The conferences did provide a fund of experience for believers involved in the area of interaction and fellowship; they also renewed an emphasis on indigenous music and worship, and explored the educational, evangelistic and legal aspects of life in Israel for local believers. A sharpening (though not a resolution) of issues dividing believers both theologically and practically was also effected. The last meeting of the conference was held at the Shalhevetya (Finnish School) Centre during Hanuka 1978.

## National Conference of Leaders

During Sukkot (Tabernacles) 1981, *Jews For Jesus*, a major evangelistic organization headquartered in California, invited Israeli Hebrew-speaking leaders to meet with their board of directors during its visit to Israel. Two days of discussions about the Israeli situation resulted. The JFJ board then announced that it would not commence a work in Israel, but recommended that local leaders set up their own independent framework. A national conference of congregational {67} elders and leaders was eventually formed, and it has been functioning for some four years now.

Like the earlier national Hebrew-speaking conferences, the above conference has had to contend with the diversity and divisiveness inherent in the Israeli situation. It has restricted itself to limited inter-congregational discussion of practical and theological issues relevant to the Israeli scene.

This has resulted in some cooperation in the area of prayer and tract distribution. The conference agendas have covered familiar territory – Jewish identity; Jewish-Arab relations; the Torah and the Jewish believer; Israeli law and the Jewish believer; evangelism; cooperative action; response to the local media; and cults.

## Other Initiatives

When the Executive Secretary of the I.H.C.A., Ron Lewis, and his predecessor, Harcourt Samuel, visited Israel in 1980, they met with representatives from a number of congregations in Jerusalem, Haifa and Gush Dan (the greater Tel-Aviv area). Their hope was to encourage the renewal of a national Hebrew Christian-Messianic Jewish framework, one which had existed during the Mandate period and the early years of the State. Several meetings to that end were held in the north but local leadership did not come to a consensus about the matter. In Gush Dan, however, inter-congregational area meetings unrelated to the I.H.C.A. were eventually begun, and these continue to the present day.

In Jerusalem the Israel Secretary of the I.H.C.A. joined with a group of local believers to form a citywide framework of Jewish believers meeting outside existing congregational and organizational frameworks. This lasted three years, with meetings held several times a year, often coinciding with Jewish festivals, as well as in five house fellowships around Jerusalem. The movement met with increasing opposition from some congregational leaders and individual believers (both Jewish and Gentile) who felt the effort was divisive and discriminatory towards non-Jews, since Gentiles (except those married to Jewish spouses) were not invited to most of the gatherings. At its peak this group gathered together over one hundred Jewish believers and represented a cross-section of Jerusalem's diverse Jewish believers. At present one house group of mainly English-speaking Jewish believers continues to meet monthly for fellowship and discussion of specific issues of concern to Jewish believers.

## Ongoing Ministries

One should not ignore those ongoing ministries which, although directed by a small denominational or organizational nucleus, reach out to serve the wider community of believers. Examples are the Caspari Centre and its "Telem" program (Theological Education by Extension) under the Lutheran sponsorship of the DNI (Norwegian Mission to Israel), and the Beit Immanuel Study Centre, under the Anglican sponsorship of ITAC. The production of a modern language Hebrew New Testament and its accompanying annotation project represents another phase of cooperative effort under the leadership of the Bible Society of Israel.

## Charismatic Movement

The charismatic movement, which at first affected mainly the expatriate community in the 1970's, has had considerable impact on many native Israeli believers. Some practical effects in the area of cooperation have been seen in several congregations which have moved away from strictly denominational frameworks. Thus, several Anglican and Baptist congregations have integrated members of other denominational streams into their congregations and {68} leadership, and have

promoted cooperative efforts in the form of national conferences. Of special note are the national Passover conferences organized by a committee of young Israelis involved in this movement, as well as area meetings (notably in the Galilee).

## Messianic Judaism

Messianic Judaism as it is understood in the Diaspora is also a part of the Israeli mosaic. As in the Diaspora, it tends to encourage the retention or integration of rabbinic elements in its worship and practice. It exists alongside an older form of “biblical Judaism” influenced by Sabbatarianism (a sect which rejects Rabbinic interpretation of biblical precepts – the so-called “Oral Law” – but accepts the written precepts as still binding on Jewish believers).

In February 1986 Dan Juster, one of the founders and the President of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) in North America, in cooperation with a Messianic congregation in Ramat Hasharon led a weekend seminar and Sabbath “happening” attended by some 200 local believers from a significant cross-section of local streams. Juster shared his North American experience of Messianic Judaism and its theological perspective, appealing for an Israeli development of the movement. To date the seminar was the major effort of this trend to communicate its distinctives to the wider believing community while fostering greater cooperation among its diverse elements.

## Musical Cooperation

During the mid-1950’s a Hebrew hymnal was produced which was for the most part a translation of standard Protestant Evangelical hymns with a few traditional Hebrew hymns added. The need for worship music which was more Jewish and Israeli was already being felt, possibly as a result of the musical creativity among American Jewish believers (like Dauermann and Chernoff), whose musical output was even reaching the Israel of the mid-seventies. During the course of the youth conferences in the late seventies, several musical workshops and seminars were devoted to promoting more indigenous Hebrew music for the local body.

In 1980 several believing musicians organized a series of workshops and meetings for the creation and dissemination of Israeli messianic music. To date, this has resulted in the publication of four booklets and cassette tapes of bible songs in Hebrew. These have been widely circulated among local Hebrew-speaking congregations and fellowships and they are also used at conferences and general meetings. Many of the songs are short and catchy, and the influences of the contemporary American folk-music scene and popular Hassidic-style music (e.g. Hassidic Song Festival) are apparent.

## Literature Cooperation

As noted earlier, there have been co-operative efforts in the field of literature production, and this continues to a limited extent. MISHKAN and SELECTIONS (a digest of news clippings of interest to the Christian community) are two efforts which have reached out the farthest in reflecting the Israeli scene to many outside the country. While there have been informal talks

among local Israeli producers of Hebrew messianic literature, it has not yet reached the stage of full-scale cooperation except, as already mentioned, in the area of tracts and literature evangelism.

L. C. J. E.

The Lausanne Committee on Jewish Evangelism is an outgrowth of the 1980 Miniconsultation in Thailand on Christian witness to the Jewish people (the Jewish people being one of 17 diverse {69} target groups at that international conference). It has also sought to foster cooperation in the area of Jewish evangelism. The Israeli branch of LCJE has cooperated with a subcommittee of the national leaders' conference, mainly in the area of tract distribution.

### "Speaking the Truth in Love"

In a country like Israel one may reasonably decry the trends toward denominationalism and sectarianism which so compromise and weaken the Gospel testimony. This divisiveness exists not only in the formal sense of "the two and seventy jarring sects conflict" (to quote Omar Khayyam) but also in the strongly partisan attitudes of individuals and groups functioning with or without denominational labels.

One must hasten to say that some of this strongly partisan spirit is justifiably due to differing understandings of faith and works. One cannot hope for unity, or even for cooperation, built on the compromise of one's basic commitments. One can, however, hope for unity and cooperation free from partisan and personal prejudice, a unity wherein the essentials of faith are shared.

The dilemma remains: how to distinguish between what is essential and what may be regarded as secondary, that which awaits resolution, in the Talmudic phrase, "when Elijah comes". A view of biblical prophecy and its fulfillment, for example, may seem to many to fall into the "Elijah" category, but will be seen as quite basic for most Israeli Jewish believers. Nevertheless, the dilemma could be worked out in the spirit of the apostle writing to the Ephesians:

*"... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:15-16).*



# {70} BOOK REVIEW

## Talmud and the New Testament

“Kol Kore or the Talmud and the New Testament”

*By: Eliyahu Zvi Levi Soloveichik.*

A new Hebrew edition published by the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research, Jerusalem 1985.

Revised and supplied with notes by J. Bar-Isaiah, and with an introduction by G. Ekeroth.

By Kai Kjaer-Hansen

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More than one hundred years ago Eliyahu Zvi Levi Soloveichik (of the famous line of Lithuanian Rabbis) published a Hebrew translation of the Gospel of Matthew, together with an introduction and a commentary. The book was given the title *Kol Kore*, to be understood as a “summons” with biblical connotations – literally, “a voice crying” (Is. 40:3; Mt. 3:2). Its purpose was to present and interpret the Gospel, the life of Jesus and His message using the background of rabbinic sources. This work of Eliyahu Z. L. Soloveichik has recently been republished by the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research, and the pseudonymous J. Bar-Isaiah has served as editor of the new edition. This review will briefly touch upon the personal background of Eliyahu Z. L. Soloveichik and upon the new edition of *Kol Kore*, and then will focus upon Soloveichik’s approach to the New Testament and to the person of Jesus.

### Eliyahu Soloveichik

The publishers of the new edition of *Kol Kore* do not make any effort to communicate anything about the author, Eliyahu Z. L. Soloveichik (i.e. Elias Soloweczyk). He is only mentioned as a “rabbinic scholar.” That he was learned and well-read cannot be doubted. In 1846, for example, he published the first book of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* in German, and the influence of the Rambam can also be traced in *Kol Kore*. Soloveichik was born around the year 1800 in Kovno, Lithuania and belonged to the renowned Lithuanian rabbinic family of that name. A family tree appears in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Vol. XV: 127ff.). He died at a relatively advanced age in the late 1870’s. In a future article we hope to present more details about Soloveichik.

### The new edition of *Kol Kore*

In the new edition of this work the text has been somewhat modernized to make it more accessible to a modern Hebrew audience. Although this is a perfectly legitimate modification, the book’s value {71} as a research resource is thereby diminished.

The editor of the new edition notes that most of the changes in the text have been made in Soloveichik's introduction and commentary. However, it can be observed that mistakes and typographical errors in the original translation of the Gospel have also been corrected. Similarly, grammatical and linguistic improvements have been made. In this new edition the text has been fully vocalized. Furthermore, the editor has supplied the new edition with critical notes. It appears, according to the notes on p. 208, that in some places the editor does not fully agree with the author's original intent.

### Earlier editions of *Kol Kore*.

In the Hebrew-English introduction to the new edition of *Kol Kore* G. Ekeroth says, "This present volume was first published over a hundred years ago in Hebrew, French, Polish, German and English." To my knowledge the book was not published in English; at least I have not found anything to verify this claim. As a point of clarification, the book was published in the following order: French edition, Paris 1870; reprinted, Paris 1875 (in 1875 a similar French translation and commentary on the Gospel of Mark was published in Paris); German edition, Leipzig 1877; Polish edition, Paris 1879; and finally, the Hebrew edition appeared, printed in Paris and published in 1879. Evidently the French edition is based on a Hebrew manuscript, existing prior to 1870.

"As far as we can determine," continues Ekeroth, "the author published these editions himself." If it is meant that Soloveichik in the beginning had no organization behind him, Ekeroth is mistaken. The Polish-born "Comte" Kavier Branicki, to whom the various editions have been dedicated, financed the publishing of the book. Moreover, Soloveichik, in his book on Mark, openly tells about his condition of life and poverty in Paris in the 1870's and about the formation of "*une petite societe*," so that he could fully dedicate himself to the work while supporting his family. Altogether twenty persons, Jews as well as Christians, are mentioned by name when he describes this society.

### The Hebrew translation of Matthew's Gospel

I will not evaluate at this time the value of the Hebrew translation or discuss its prototype. The publishers, however, are correct when they state, "The value of the work is not in the clarity or beauty of the Hebrew translation of Matthew." The editor suggests that Soloveichik himself made the translation. In the new series *Traductions Hebraiques des Euangiles* (See *Mishkan* vol. 1, pp. 62-65) Jean Carmignac also listed Soloveichik among the translators of the New Testament into Hebrew (vol. 1, p. VIII). Soloveichik, though, did not make his own translation. Apart from printing errors, his translation is identical with the translation published by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews in 1838. Providing a new Hebrew translation of the Gospel, therefore, is not the primary motivation for this edition. Evaluating the book, Ekeroth continues, "it is in the evaluation of the life of Jesus by a rabbinical scholar who was able to see the Jewishness of Jesus in a very remarkable way."

## A tool for further study

The publishers of the new edition do not hide the fact that the book is *not* “a great confirmation of the Christian faith and doctrines... It is a source, a tool for further study by both scholar and serious layman.” However, it is also pointed out by Ekeroth that “the author’s original motivation ... is an attempt to bring peace and understanding between Judaism and Christianity.” {72} Ekeroth continues, “We don’t have evidence that his objective was realized to any great degree during his lifetime. In view of the great progress that has been made in recent years in dialogue between Jews and Christians, at least at the academic level, it is possible that the book was written, ‘for such a time as this.’” This hope, I believe, will show itself to be a grand illusion. To wit, it is not enough to stress the Jewishness of Jesus, if the Jewish Jesus competes with and conquers the uniqueness of Jesus, who was according to all sources a Jew indeed.

Every book which improves the understanding between Judaism and Christianity should be welcomed, as well as every book which gives us a better understanding of the Jewishness of Jesus. Certainly in *Kol Kore* there are details which deserve consideration and reflection. The author is learned and well-versed in rabbinic literature, and has also tried from his perspective to penetrate into the New Testament. Soloveichik is of the opinion that all books in the New Testament were originally written in Hebrew (p. 56). As a proof that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, he brings the word-play Yeshua-Yoshia found in Matt. 1:21 (as an aside he always uses Jesus’ historically correct Hebrew name Yeshua, never Yeshu). He finds another proof in Matt. 26:17: referring to Exodus 11:15, he thinks that the phrase refers to the day *before* Passover. Matthew, writing in Hebrew, used the word *rishon* here with this meaning (cf. Job 15:7). This usage, according to Soloveichik, was misunderstood by the Greek translator.

## The New Testament authors – Talmudists?

The authors of the New Testament were nearly all Jews. Most of them belonged to the party of the Pharisees and were, according to the author, Talmudists (*ba’alei Talmud*). They used similar methods of interpretation and modifications as did other Jewish Talmudists (cf. the commentary on Matt. 7:14; 8:17). Jesus Himself and His followers, however, belonged to the party (*kat*) of the Essenes, as explained in the commentary on Matt. 2:1 and 19:19. A longer explanation about the relationship between the Pharisees and the Essenes is given by the author in his commentary on Matt. 5:3.

Furthermore, Soloveichik asserts that nothing negative is said about Jesus of Nazareth in the Talmud. Thus, the passages speaking negatively about *Yeshu* in the Talmud are interpreted as referring to another person. This interpretation, already found in the Middle Ages, still has its spokesmen. Personally, I doubt that the solution is that easy. The author discusses the problem in the commentary on Matt. 2:1. Interestingly, in his book on Mark (1875), Soloveichik uses the Talmudic passages as a counterproof against those who claimed that Jesus never lived (p. XII).

In spite of his good intentions, I do not believe that the author has succeeded in achieving his purposes. His aim was not only to interpret the New Testament using the background of his intimate knowledge of the rabbinic sources, but also to *prove* that the New Testament is in full

agreement with the Talmud. He does not hide his opinion that all other interpreters have been mistaken.

## Jesus – a tzaddik?

What, then, is the picture of Jesus which Soloveichik presents? This becomes clear from the way he deals with Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. For Soloveichik Jesus is *one* Messiah, not *the* Messiah; he is *a* son of God, not *the* Son of God. In the Talmud he finds sources supporting the belief that God wanted to make Hezekiah a Messiah but chose not to do that. In a similar way, Soloveichik finds that Peter in Matt. 16:16 does the {73} same as the Talmudists: Hezekiah's righteousness was so great that the Talmudists felt that He ought to be looked upon as Messiah; similarly, Peter felt that Jesus was such a great *tzaddik* that He ought to be called Messiah and son of God.

In Soloveichik's overall view there is no real difference between Jesus as Son of God and man as son of God. This becomes clear from his commentary on the temptation story (Matt. 4). Soloveichik believes that Jesus had a vision wherein He thought that He had been in the wilderness forty days. But, according to the author, the vision lasted only for one or two hours. As does every man, Jesus had a body, soul and spirit. Then referring to Paul's words that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the Spirit against the flesh (Gal. 5:17), he states that he whose spirit overcomes the lust of the flesh can be called a son of God. Understood in this way, the designation "son of God" has no supernatural significance. Only by neglecting all the passages in the New Testament wherein it is claimed that men can become children of God by believing in the unique Son of God, can Soloveichik reach this conclusion. In addition Soloveichik must deny that Jesus called people to believe in Himself. This too is explicitly claimed in his commentary.

In dealing with the birth narrative (Matt. 1:18) and the conception by the Holy Spirit, Soloveichik presents two opinions: the first is his claim that there is nothing new under the sun; the second deals with a literal interpretation. He claims that his own opinion can be supported from John 10:34-36.

In his introduction to the chapter on Messiah (pp. 42-50) he clearly states his view: referring among others to Maimonides, he expresses his opinion that the Messiah is not of divine nature. Messiah has to be a man like every other man: he shall eat and drink, marry, beget sons and daughters and die. Hereafter, in demonstrating that the New Testament is in accordance with this view, he only quotes passages which talk about the Second Coming (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:6). By utilizing such a selective hermeneutic it is not difficult to bring the New Testament into line with the Talmud.

As an example of how Soloveichik interprets other central New Testament passages, I limit myself to the following two cases from the end of the Gospel.

1. *The Last Supper* (Matt. 26:26-28). When Jesus says that the bread is His body and the wine His blood, the meaning is only that Jesus eats and drinks the last supper together with His disciples. The death of Jesus is, therefore, not a unique, atoning death.

2. *The Great Commission* (Matt. 28:1720). Here Soloveichik summarizes his view on the mission of Jesus. Jesus' main tasks were to reaffirm the Mosaic Law and the principles of God's oneness, the eternity of the soul and eternal rewards and punishments. Soloveichik maintains that the resurrection of Jesus was not a bodily resurrection. As Rabbi Nachman after his death appeared to Rabba in a dream (*Mo'ed Katan* 28a), so Jesus after His death appeared to His disciples in a similar way, to teach them about the eternity of the soul.

The author's commentary on Jesus' commission to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit reveals that he misunderstands the Christian belief. Three things must be learned, he states: (1) the belief in the Father as the one God; (2) as Jesus was righteous (*a tzaddik*), everyone who is like Him can be called son of God; and (3) the belief in prophetic inspiration, meaning that the soul of man is a part of the Divine and therefore cannot die. "And this is the basis of the whole Law." With this remark he ends his commentary.

#### {74} The quest for the Jesus of the New Testament.

For one who shows respect for the New Testament record, it is not easy to express an uncritical enthusiasm for the book. Soloveichik once dreamed about a *dat olamit*, a universal religion, as seen in a Jewish source from 1931; in this dream he was certainly not alone. Others dreamed it together with him and supported him in his work. In this dream Jesus was a prophet. Without any serious discussion of the complexity of the matter, Soloveichik simply states that such was decided at a church council in Jerusalem in 338 (cf. Matt. 11:6; 13:57). Many others, both Jews and Christians, have up to our own time pictured Jesus as a great Jewish prophet and tried to give Him a place among the great sons of Israel.

The question remains, "Was Jesus only *one* prophet among other prophets, only *one* messiah among other messiahs, only *one* son of God among other sons of God?" Naturally this is a question which involves faith. But going back to the New Testament sources, which sources Soloveichik claims that he alone has understood correctly, there should be no doubt that the New Testament authors give Jesus a totally different role than that claimed by Soloveichik.

Against this backdrop it is legitimate to raise the question as to whether *Kol Kore* is an acceptable "summons" to Hebrew-speaking Jews today, and whether the book can be used as an evangelistic tool. If it cannot (though of course it is legitimate to publish books for other purposes), this does not mean that it should not have been republished. From the point of view of research, the book is of interest. Details and observations may be found which may be of help for New Testament research. Nevertheless, I have grave doubts as to whether the book contributes to a greater understanding between Jews and Christians today, for it does not give a reliable New Testament picture about Jesus.

Every man of good will who has eyes with which to read may, regardless of his belief, object to how Soloveichik deals with New Testament sources, and may perhaps also object to some of his treatment of Rabbinic sources. When all is said and done, it is better to agree to disagree than to try to fabricate an agreement on untenable grounds. If the New Testament picture of Jesus must be the foundation for the evaluation of what is Christian belief, then the significance of Jesus cannot be reduced in the way Soloveichik does. He does challenge us, though, by claiming that Christians generally have too little knowledge of the Talmud and that Jews generally have too little

knowledge of the New Testament. This challenge should not go unheeded; nevertheless, other answers than those given by Soloveichik are needed.

{75} Review of

# The Zionism of God

by Claude Duvernoy (Akiva Press, Jerusalem, 1985)

(about \$12)

By Walter Riggans

*Walter Riggans is a staff member of the Israel Trust of the Anglican Church and Director of the Immanuel House Study Center, Tel Aviv.*

This will prove to be an important book in Christian Zionist circles worldwide, but it is in fact disappointing as a serious work of theology. Let me organize my criticism in the following order:

## A. Theological and Historical Preconceptions.

Duvernoy delights in pointing out the preconceptions he sees in the work of others, but seems unaware of his own. As a result he often confuses the repeated proclamation of a point with its justification. Early in the book he even goes beyond legitimate criticism of other peoples theologies to deny that other denominations or groups have a theology at all. Constantly he says that Zionism is the real theology of history, while all other interpretations of theology or history are mere human creations. Confused thinking is apparent at all levels.

Here are some examples. At one point he states that:

*Israel had to learn that it is its unique destiny to choose between a gilded existence in exile and an austere life of independence (p. 33).*

It is not as simple as this. Anti-semitism, persecutions and insecurity in their home countries have driven more Jews to Israel than a heroic rejection of materialism. At another point he says that it is clear from the Bible (which only refers to the Old Testament in his usage, as in standard Jewish terminology) that when Israel is restored to her land by God “The re-establishment of Israel will come about against the will of the nations” (p. 45). Yet later he makes much of the fact that God managed to have all nations, even Russia, vote for the 1947 partition! He never attempts to resolve the tensions in this patent inconsistency. Duvernoy constantly presents Zionism as a monolithic factor in history, whereas the opposite is true. Under the umbrella term “Zionism” one finds differing perspectives, tactics and goals.

{76} A fundamental principle of Duvernoy’s in this book is that:

*One may push aside a holy book (as the so-called Christian world has done with the Gospels) but it is impossible for a people to ignore its own history (p. 196).*

Unfortunately, history is replete with examples of peoples doing just that, and the Jewish people are included among all nations on this point, as the Bible itself makes very clear. Many other examples of fuzzy thinking could be cited from this work if space permitted.

## B. His Treatment of Life in Israel Today.

I have lived in Israel for some years now, and my remarks here are based on those everyday experiences. Duvernoy's statements, however, seem to be based on some ideological construct, for all that he too lives in Israel. For instance – he says of the state school system:

*It has placed the Holy Scriptures in the centre of its educational system (P. 185).*

He uses this to imply a thirst for the supernatural and for the holy which is not even present in “Christian” nations. Come and speak to Israelis; find out if this is truly their schooling experience. Ask Jewish believers here whether the Bible was taught by those with a thirst for the supernatural and the holy. It is taught, usually, merely as a sociological or geographical source book.

There are appropriate ways to speak highly of the restoration of the Hebrew language in Israel, but again Duvernoy gives a false picture when he says that:

*Nobody in Israel can claim to have a good command of Hebrew if he does not have an equally good command of the ancient biblical text (p. 189).*

Israel is full of sabras who find the text of the Old Testament to be a closed or semi-closed book. Furthermore, he speaks of kibbutz life as if it too were monolithic, which is not the case. How many kibbutznikim would describe their lives and work, especially in the 1980's, as “an almost utopian venture” (p. 198)? Perhaps 40 years ago this was true, but Duvernoy claims that today:

*A new generation has arisen in Israel, very close to the generation of the Maccabees and of David the shepherd (P. 198).*

His entire presentation of contemporary Israel is utopian, unrealistic, and therefore of no real and lasting value in the end.

## C. General Theology.

I will begin here with his fickle treatment of apocalyptic literature. Duvernoy often speaks of the apocalyptic significance of much of what the Bible has to say about Israel and history. For example:

*The apocalyptic biblical literature of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament predict a moment in history when the nations will break down under God's judgment (p. 164). A biblical prophecy, much ignored until the present, now comes into its own for the attentive reader, sensitive to the maturing significance of the end of this century (p. 169).*



Yet earlier on, when it suited his purpose to suggest that other theologians had a deficient understanding of prophecy, he wrote:

*The Gospels show, on several occasions, that Jesus developed a vision of history which the theologians rather thoughtlessly ... call apocalyptic, a convenient term because it implies that this vision is esoteric, fantastic and consequently rejectable (p. 88).*

{77} Duvernoy has no “fulfillment theology” of any sort regarding concepts or types in both Testaments. It is to be noted that, true to his genre, he never deals with the New Testament Book of Hebrews. It follows from this that he has no place in his world-view for Jewish believers. In Duvernoy’s theology Jewish people do not need to believe in Jesus at all. Here is his fundamental statement vis-à-vis Israel, salvation and God’s grace:

*God does not demand ... conversion as a precondition for his salvation, but salvation will come against his natural inclinations ... this is what every sound Judaeo-Christian theology means by Grace. The Jewish people is indeed the most convincing demonstration of divine Grace (p. 58).*

It is true that the initiative is always with God, and that He has unconditional love for Israel and all people, but this does not mean that His blessing and support for Israel (or any other people) is unconditional. Nor does it mean that salvation will come fatalistically to Israel; rather, she too must search for God, renounce her own ways and follow Him.

#### D. Christology and the Church.

Duvernoy has a clearly reductionist Christology, with a marked lack of interest in Jesus’ *kenosis*. He says that Jesus’ incarnation was merely “Incognito” (p. 65). For him, the “new era” of God’s dealings with men is not linked to Jesus’ incarnation, nor yet to the cross, the resurrection or the ascension, but only with Messiah’s *parousia* in overwhelming power and glory (p. 70). Of Jesus’ death he says that “Rome emerged as the victor” (p. 82).

Upon examining his treatment of the Body of Christ on earth I found myself particularly offended on behalf of our Jewish brothers and sisters in Jesus for the lack of interest that Duvernoy shows in them. In his summary questions he asks a series of rhetorical questions, including the following:

*Is there a better and clearer manifestation of the grace of God than this Zionist epic which is still in process? Has there ever been a more convincing proof of God’s sovereign reign of History? Has there ever been a more moving illustration of the mystery of Incarnation? Has there ever been a clearer announcement of the Parousia? (P. 229)*

I am afraid that my answer to this is “Yes”. I believe that to argue within his frames of reference, the most convincing proof of God’s faithfulness, to Himself, to Israel, to all peoples, is the existence of Jewish believers. In this book, though Duvernoy finds grace upon grace for Israel, he surprisingly finds none whatsoever for the Church. One cannot sense any compassion or graciousness or even forgiveness for past mistakes and sins of the Church. Duvernoy’s sweeping generalizations about the Church and Christian groups will not bear scrutiny by anyone aware of

or sympathetic to the work of Christians throughout the world. Examples of his universal judgments will be found on pp. 106, 185, 220, 224-226.

#### E. Exegesis and Eisegesis.

It would not be possible, nor is it necessary, to detail the many ungrounded interpretations of Scripture found in this slim volume. Duvernoy never once makes any attempt to unpack a text and look at it clearly in its context. Stark examples of his eisegetical use of Scripture can be found on pp. 29, 51, 57, 80, 81, 102, 128, 220. Such a “Procrustes’ bed” approach does no honor to the position Duvernoy is attempting to champion.

#### {78} F. Concluding Remarks.

Duvernoy has read a great deal, and passionately believes what he teaches; however, he shows absolutely no mastery of his subject. He proclaims rather than educates, and is frequently simplistic, confused and Christologically reductionist. It seems to this reviewer that he has written and published to please “the already converted”, but he has failed to give us the full biblical revelation describing Zion under God, with Jesus the Messiah set there as the one sure Rock and Stumbling-stone.

Jewish people, like David Flusser who contributed the foreword, may find this book pleasing and progressive, but Christians will rightly question what is Christian, or even New Testament, about the author’s approach.

Finally, a word about Duvernoy’s approach. Duvernoy sets out an “all or nothing” challenge: if one accepts what he says then one is working from the Bible’s theology of history. But one who disposes with much of it, as I have done, is in danger of being labeled “anti-Zionist” and possibly even “anti-Semitic”. Such a false dichotomy is deeply offensive to Christians who believe that in fact one can be evangelistic to Jewish people, one can plant congregations of predominantly Jewish believers, and yet also be strongly supportive of the Jewish people as a whole and the State of Israel in particular. The truth is that one *can* stand in both camps. *This is* the biblical Zionism of Isaiah, Jesus and Paul. *This is* the Zionism of God!