GRACE AND VOCATION WITHOUT REMORSE: COMMENTS ON THE TREATISE *DE IUDAEIS*

BENEDICT XVI

"The covenant between God and Israel is indestructible because of the continuity of God's election. But at the same time, it is codetermined by the whole drama of human error. . . . [The] journey of God with his people finally finds its summary and final figure in the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, which anticipates and carries within itself the Cross and Resurrection."

1. THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

Since Auschwitz, it has been clear that the Church needs to think anew about the question of the nature of Judaism. With the declaration *Nostra aetate*, the Second Vatican Council provided the first basic indications. To be sure, we first have to specify what the treatise on the Jews [*De Iudaeis*] is about. The justly-praised book by Franz Mußner on this theme is essentially a book about

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the enduring positive meaning of the Old Testament. This is undoubtedly very important, but it does not correspond to the theme *De Iudaeis*. For "Judaism" in the strict sense does not mean the Old Testament, which is essentially common to Jews and Christians. In fact, there are two responses in history to the destruction of the temple and the new radical exile of Israel: Judaism and Christianity. It is true that Israel had already experienced several times the situation of the destruction of the temple and scattering. However, each time they were permitted to hope for a rebuilding of the temple and a return to the promised land. After the destruction of the temple in the year 70 AD, and definitively after the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt, the concrete situation was different. In the given situation, the destruction of the temple and the scattering of Israel had to be considered as lasting at least a very long time. Finally, it became increasingly clear in the course of development that the temple with its cult was not to be restored, even if the political situation allowed it. But there was another answer for Jews to the destruction and scattering, an answer that, from the beginning, presupposed these events as definitive, and presupposed that the resulting situation was a process that the faith of Israel itself anticipated. This was the reaction of the Christians, who were not entirely separated from Judaism initially, but claimed to uphold the continuity of Israel in their faith. As we know, only a small part of Israel has been able to accept this answer, while the larger part resisted it and sought a solution in some other way. Of course, the two ways were by no means clearly separated from one another at the beginning, and thus they each developed again and again through debate with the other.

As the Acts of the Apostles shows, the community born of the message, life, suffering, and Cross of Jesus of Nazareth at first made its way entirely within Israel. However, it gradually expanded its proclamation into Greek realms and thus visibly came into conflict with Israel. The conclusion of Acts is significant for this process. In Rome, Paul once again began with the Jews, trying to convince them of an interpretation of Scripture in light of the event of Jesus, but he was met with rejection—a rejection that he found foretold in Isaiah 6:9–10. If here the separation of the two communities seems to be complete, the process undoubtedly dragged on much longer elsewhere, so that

the dialogue continued and both sides remained in conflict with each other.

The Christian community expressed its identity in the writings of the New Testament, which originated essentially in the second half of the first century. However, it took some time before these writings coalesced into a canon, which then represents the authoritative document for Christian identity. These writings, however, do not stand on their own but constantly refer to the "Old Testament," that is, to the Bible of Israel. Their purpose is to show the authentic interpretation of the Old Testament scriptures in the events surrounding Jesus Christ. The Christian canon, then, by its nature consists of two parts: the Old Testament—the Scripture of Israel and now of Judaism—as well as the New Testament, which authentically clarifies the way to interpret the Old in light of Jesus. The "Old Testament scriptures" thus remain common to both communities, even though they are interpreted differently. In addition, among Christians, the Greek translation of the Old Testament books dating back to about the third century BC, the so-called Septuagint, was de facto recognized as canonical alongside and with the Hebrew Bible. In this respect, the Christian canon was more extensive than that of the Jews. In addition, there are some not insignificant divergences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text. During this time of gradual mutual exclusion, Judaism gave the Hebrew text its final form. Furthermore, in the first centuries after Christ, in the Mishna and the Talmud, its own way of reading the sacred scriptures was decisively formulated. All this does not change the fact that both sides share a sacred book.

In the second half of the second century, Marcion and his movement tried to break this unity, so that Judaism and Christianity would have become two opposing religions. With this aim in mind, Marcion created a canon of the New Testament that stands in stark contrast to the Bible of Israel. The God of Israel (Old Testament) and the God of Jesus Christ (New Testament) are conceived as two different and opposing deities. For Marcion, the God of the Old Testament is a God of merciless justice; the God of Jesus Christ is the God of mercy and love. Accordingly, he formed a New Testament canon solely from the gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's letters, which of course had to be edited to serve his purpose. After a short period of activity, Marcion was

excommunicated by the Church in Rome, and his religion was excluded as not belonging to Christianity. Of course, the Marcionite temptation persists and reappears in certain situations in the history of the Church.

At this juncture, we note that Judaism and Christianity developed along divergent paths through a difficult process and so formed themselves into two separate communities. And yet, despite the authoritative writings in which their own identities are both formulated, they remain connected through the common foundation of the "Old Testament" as their common Bible.

At this point the question arises as to how the two separate communities, united by a common Bible, judge one another. Here we encounter the treatise *De Iudaeis*, often called *Adversus Judaeos* and conceived in a polemical context. The negative judgments about the Jews, which also reflect the political and social problems of coexistence, are well known and have repeatedly led to anti-Semitic failures. On the other hand, as we saw earlier, the Church of Rome with its rejection of Marcion in the second century made it clear that Christians and Jews worship the same God. The holy books of Israel are also the holy books of Christendom. The faith of Abraham is also the faith of the Christians; Abraham is also for them "the father of faith."

This fundamental commonality includes, of course, contrasting interpretations:

1) For Jews it is clear that Jesus is not the messiah and therefore Christians are wrong to invoke their Bible, the "Old Testament." Their basic argument is and reads: the messiah brings peace; Christ did not bring peace into the world.

2) Christians respond to this that after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and in view of Israel's diaspora situation (which had no end in sight), Scripture, the "Old Testament," had to be newly interpreted; in its previous form it could no longer be lived and understood. In his saying about the temple being destroyed and rebuilt in three days, Jesus anticipated the event of the destruction of the temple and announced a new form of worship, whose midpoint would be the gift of his body, by which the Sinai covenant would be brought to its definitive form, becoming the new covenant. At the same time, the covenant would

be extended to all believers, thus giving the promise of land its definitive meaning.

It was therefore evident to Christians that the message of Jesus Christ, his death and Resurrection, signified the God-given turning point of time. And the interpretation of the sacred books in light of Jesus Christ is, as it were, an interpretation legitimated by God.

Traditionally, the Old Testament is divided into three types of books: *Torah* (Law), *Nebiim* (Prophets), and *Ketubim* (Wisdom books and Psalms). In Judaism the emphasis is entirely on the Torah; and in fact, the other books (with the exception of the Psalms), especially the prophetic books, have only a secondary weight. Among Christians the perspective shifts. The whole Old Testament is now understood as prophecy, as *sacramentum futuri*. Even the five books of Moses are essentially prophecies. This entails a dynamic approach to the Old Testament, whose texts are not to be read statically in themselves, but must be understood altogether as a movement forward toward Christ. In the Church's praxis, this has resulted in a concrete redistribution of emphasis: the Wisdom books are the foundation of moral instruction in the catechumenate and for Christian life in general. The Torah and the prophets are read as anticipated Christology. The Psalms become the great prayer book of the Church. Traditionally, David is considered their author. For Christians, however, the author is first Jesus Christ, who is the real David and thus the one praying the Psalms. The Psalms are read from him and with him.

The original historical meaning of the texts is not thereby repealed, but it must be exceeded. The first two lines of the famous *Distychon* on the four senses of Scripture characterize this movement: *Littera facta docet. Quid credas allegoria. Moralis quid agas. Quo tendas anagogia*.

Already by the time of Gregory the Great, however, there is a shift away from this reweighting: "allegory," the christological reading of the whole of Scripture, loses some of its importance, and the moral sense comes increasingly to the fore. With Thomas Aquinas and his new view of theology, allegory is fundamentally devalued (only the literal sense can be used in arguments). De facto, the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle becomes the basis of Christian morality. Here the danger of the loss of meaning for the whole Old Testament is obvious.

2. VATICAN II'S NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROBLEM

In No. 4 of the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is formulated in a decisive way. Historical errors are rejected, and the truly authentic content of the Christian tradition in matters of Judaism is formulated, thus giving a valid measure for a newly-fashioned treatise *De Judaeis*. In 2015, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews published "A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4)," in which it offers an authoritative summary of previous developments. From this overview, one can say that the new view of Judaism that developed after the Council can be summarized in two statements:

1) The "theory of substitution," which has hitherto determined theological reflection on this question, should be rejected. This view holds that after the rejection of Jesus Christ, Israel ceased to be the bearer of the promises of God, so that it could now be called the people "who were once your chosen people" (*Prayer for the Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*).

2) Instead, it is more correct to speak of the never-revoked covenant—a theme that was developed after the Council in connection with Romans 9–11.

Both of these theses—that Israel is not replaced [*substituiert*] by the Church, and that the covenant was never revoked—are basically correct, but are in many ways imprecise and need to be given further critical consideration.

First, it should be noted that there was no "theory of substitution" as such before the Council: none of the three editions of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Buchberger - Rahner - Kasper) contains an entry on the theory of substitution. It is also missing from Protestant lexicons such as *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (3rd ed.). It should be said, however, that in the index of the Kasper edition of the *Lexikon*, the word *Substitutionstheorie* appears under entries on the "Old Testament II" (Breuning), "Israel III" (Breuning), and "People of God I" (W. Kraus).

Just as the "theory of substitution" did not exist as such, so too is the idea of Israel's position in salvation history after

Christ not something that theology understood in a uniform way. It is true, though, that texts such as the parable of the vineyard tenants (Mk 12:1–11) or the wedding feast (Mt 22:1–14; Lk 14:15–24)—to which the invitees do not come and are then replaced by others—largely shaped the understanding of Israel's rejection and how this functions in the present history of salvation.

On the other hand, it was clear that Israel or Judaism always maintained a special position and was not simply submerged in the world of other religions. Above all, two points of view have always resisted the idea that the Jewish people have been totally cut off from the promise:

1) Israel is undeniably the possessor of Holy Scripture. It is true that 2 Corinthians says that in reading Scripture a veil covers the heart of Israel, and that this veil will be taken away only through turning to the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:15f). But it remains the case, after all, that with Holy Scripture one is holding God's revelation in one's hands. The Fathers of the Church, such as Augustine, emphasized that Israel must be deemed as existing apart from the community of the Church in order to attest to the authenticity of the Sacred Scriptures.

2) Not only does St. Paul speak of "all Israel being saved," but also the Book of Revelation of St. John sees two groups of the redeemed: 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel (which expresses in another language the same thing that Paul meant by the phrase "all Israel"); and next to them, "a great multitude that no man can number" (Rv 7:9) as the representation of the saved pagan world. According to the perspective of the New Testament, this eschatological view is not simply concerned with something that will eventually come to pass after many thousands of years; rather the "eschatological" is always also somehow present.

From both points of view, it was clear to the Church that Judaism is not one religion among others, but stands in a unique situation and therefore must be recognized as such by the Church. On this basis the idea developed in the Middle Ages of the pope's twofold obligation of protection: on the one hand, the Christians must be defended against the Jews, but also the Jews had to be protected. They alone in the medieval world could exist alongside Christians as a *religio licita*.

The question of substitution arises not only in relation to the whole of Israel as such, it is made concrete in the individual

elements in which the election presents itself: 1) the bestowal of cultic laws, which include the temple cult and the great feasts of Israel; 2) the cultic laws that concern individual Israelites: Sabbath, circumcision, food regulations, purity regulations; 3) the legal and moral instructions of the Torah; 4) the messiah; 5) the promise of land. Following this, we will address the question of the covenant.

3. THE QUESTION OF "SUBSTITUTION"

Let us therefore deal in a first part with the essential elements of the promise to which the concept of substitution could be applied; a second point will then address the question of the covenant.

3.1. The temple cult

What does the "no" to substitution mean for the Torah-regulated temple cult? Let us ask in concrete terms: Does the Eucharist replace the ritual sacrifices, or do they remain in themselves necessary? I think that here it becomes apparent that the static view of law and promise, which stands behind the unqualified no to the "theory of substitution," necessarily breaks down at this point. From the very beginning, the question of cult in Israel has evidently moved in a dialectic between criticism of the cult and loyalty to the laws governing cultic worship. I would like to refer to the third chapter of the first part of my book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. We encounter the critique of cult in texts such as 1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21–27, and so on. In the Hellenistic realm, the criticism of the cult led more and more to the total rejection of the cultic sacrificial system. The critique found concrete form in the idea of a rational sacrifice [*Logos-Opfers*]. Israel, however, always retained the knowledge that a purely spiritual sacrifice is insufficient. I refer to two texts: Daniel 3:37–43 and Psalm 51:19ff.

The Psalm says clearly in verse 16f: "You take no delight in sacrifice. . . . The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit." Then, surprisingly, in verse 18 the request and the prediction follow: "Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then will you delight in right

sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings." Modern commentators tell us that, in the end, conservative elements reintroduced what earlier verses had denied. In fact, there is a certain contradiction between the two groups of verses. But the fact that the last verse is indisputably part of the canonical text shows that a merely spiritual sacrifice alone is perceived as insufficient. The same can be seen in the aforementioned text from Daniel.

For Christians, the total self-gift of Jesus in the crucifixion is the only possible and at the same time necessary God-given synthesis of both views: the bodily Lord gives himself as a whole for us. His sacrifice includes the body, the entirely real physical world. But this is taken into the "I" of Jesus Christ and so completely elevated to the personal. For Christians, it is clear that all previous cult finds its meaning and its fulfillment only insofar as it moves toward the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In him, to which it constantly refers, the whole makes sense. In fact, there is really no "substitution," but a journey that eventually becomes one reality. And yet this entails the necessary disappearance of animal sacrifices, in place of which ("substitution") the Eucharist occurs.

Instead of a static view of substitution or nonsubstitution, there is a dynamic consideration of the whole of salvation history, which finds its ἀνακεφαλαιώσις [recapitulation] in Christ (see Eph 1:10).

3.2. Cultic laws

The question regarding cultic laws affecting individual persons (circumcision, Sabbath, etc.) revolves around the dispute over the freedom of Christians in relation to the law, especially as this was understood by Paul. Today it is clear that, on the one hand, these ordinances served the protection of Israel's identity in the great scattering among the peoples. On the other hand, the abolition of their binding character was the condition for the emergence of worldwide Christianity from the Gentiles. In this respect, these exact questions have not been a real problem for both sides since the separation of Israel and the Church. In the interconfessional polemics of the sixteenth century, Protestants reproached Catholics for reestablishing among Christians the old legalism with the ob-

ligation to fast before Mass on Sunday, abstinence from meat on Friday, etc. ("substituting" new norms for the old norms). This need not be discussed further here.

3.3. Law and morality

As for the legal and moral precepts of the Torah, from the very fact of the concrete development of the law, it is clear also among Jews that the so-called casuistic model of law is subject to development. In this respect, a dispute between Christians and Jews is not necessary here.

As concerns the actual moral instruction, which found its essential expression in the Decalogue, what the Lord said after the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17–20 applies; namely, that the law remains valid, even if it must be read anew in new situations. But this new reading is neither a repeal nor a substitution, but a deepening in unaltered validity. There is really no substitution here.

It is strange how in the present situation many people claim a substitution precisely here: the eight beatitudes are supposed to have taken the place of the commandments; the Sermon on the Mount is taken as loosening altogether the morality of the Old Testament. On this entire question, I refer to the fourth chapter of the first volume of my book *Jesus of Nazareth* (64–127). A misunderstood Paulinism is the reason for the mistaken view that here, in the foundational instructions for Christian life, a radical substitution has been effected. In fact, it is also quite clear to Paul that the moral precepts of the Old Covenant, summarized in the double commandment of love, remain valid for Christians, albeit in the new context of love for and being loved by Jesus Christ. Here points one and three merge together in Paul, and this is the true Christian novelty: the crucified Christ has borne all our guilt. In Israel, the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement and the daily sin offering were destined to carry and abolish all injustice in the world. Animal sacrifices, however, could only be a gesture that pointed toward the power that reconciles in truth.

The incarnate Son of God who takes all of the suffering and all of the guilt of the world upon himself is now this reconciliation. For the Christian, to be connected with his death

in baptism means being ensheltered within the forgiving love of God. It does not mean, however, that one's own life is now irrelevant and the moral law no longer exists for him. Rather, it means that this being one with Christ in the inner freedom of love can and must be newly lived.

Of course, the controversy over Pauline Christianity will continue, but I think that there should be a new clarity regarding the fact that the moral instruction in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is, in the end, identical and that there can be no actual "substitution" here.

3.4. The messiah

The question of the messianic identity of Jesus is and remains the real issue of dispute between Jews and Christians. Although it will not per se stop the presentation of the separation of the two paths, recent research in the Old Testament has opened up new possibilities for dialogue. Developments in recent exegesis involving the re-dating and reinterpretation of the great hopes of Israel (Gn 49:10; Nm 24:17; Sm 7:12–16; Ps 89:20–46; Am 9:14f; Is 7:10–17, 9:1–6, 11:1–9; Mi 5:1–5; Hg 2:20–23; Zez 4:8–14; and various texts of the Psalms) show a polyphony and variety of forms of hope in which the largely political figure of the new David—the "messiah-king"—is only one form of hope among others. It is evident that the *entire* Old Testament is a book of hope. At the same time, this hope expresses itself in changing forms. It is further evident that this hope points less and less to an earthly and political power, and that the importance of the passion as an essential element of hope comes increasingly to the fore.

From the New Testament testimonies about Jesus, it is clear that he was wary of the title of messiah and the ideas generally associated with this title. This becomes apparent, for example, in Jesus' remark concerning the messiah as son of David according to Psalm 110. Jesus recalls that the scribes portray the messiah as the son of David. In the Psalm, however, the messiah does not appear as David's son, but as his Lord (Mk 12:35f). Even when, in the confessional formula that was developing among the apostles, the title christ-messiah is applied to Jesus, he immediately supplements and corrects the ideas concealed in this title

with a catechesis on the suffering of the savior (see Mk 8:27–33; Mt 16:13–23). In his proclamation he himself did not draw on the Davidic tradition, but mainly on the form of the son of man formulated by Daniel as a figure of hope. In general, what was central for him was the idea of the passion, vicarious suffering and death, and atonement. The idea of God's suffering servant, of salvation through suffering, was essential for him: the songs of the suffering servant in Isaiah, as well as the mysterious visions of suffering of Zechariah, determine his image of the savior. These texts express Israel's experiences of faith during the times of exile and Hellenistic persecution. They appear as essential stages in God's journey with his people, which moves toward Jesus of Nazareth. But even Moses, who steps forth for his people and vicariously offers his own death, appears transparent to the mission of Jesus. In his important study *Gottes Selbsterniedrigung in der Theologie der Rabbinen* (Munich, 1968), Peter Kuhn has shown that the idea of the self-abasement, and even the suffering of God, is not foreign to Judaism. And he shows that there are significant approaches toward the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament hope for salvation, even if final differences still remain.

In the medieval debates between Jews and Christians, it was common for the Jewish side to quote Isaiah 2:2–5 (Mi 4:1–5) as the core of the messianic hope. We see how the one who makes a messianic claim must prove his identity before the bar of these words: "He shall decide the conflict of peoples . . . and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is 2:4; Mi 4:3f). It is clear that these words have not been fulfilled, but remain an expectation of the future.

In fact, Jesus read the promises of Israel within a broader understanding, in which the passion of God in this world, and thus the suffering of the righteous one, becomes ever more central. Neither does the triumphant accent simply dominate in his images of the kingdom of God; they too are characterized by God's struggle for and with humanity. During this time the weeds grow together with the wheat in the field of God's kingdom and are not torn up. The fishing net of God contains good and bad fish. The leaven of God's kingdom pervades the world slowly from within in order to transform it. In conversation with

Jesus on the way to Emmaus, the disciples learn that it is precisely the cross that must be the essential center of the figure of the messiah. The messiah does not appear primarily under the sign of the royal figure of David. The gospel of John, as a concluding summary of Jesus' dialogue with the Jews (which at the same time mirrors the future dialogue between Jews and Christians), offers a different account of the center of the figure of Jesus and the interpretation of Israel's hopes. In John the essential statement about the form of the promise is connected to the figure of Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people . . . him you shall heed" (Dt 18:15). The figure of Moses is characterized as having seen the Lord "face to face" (Dt 34:10). Deuteronomy itself notes that the promise has so far remained unfulfilled and that "never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Dt 34:10). In the first chapter of his gospel, John states programmatically that what was awaited in these words is now fulfilled in Jesus: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn 1:18, cf. 13:25). To begin with, we can say that Jesus did not want to bring the perfected new world of peace in an immediate way, as prophesied in Isaiah 2 and 4. Rather, he wanted to reveal God to man (also to the Gentiles) and to disclose his will—he who is the true salvation of man.

In my analysis of the eschatological discourse of Jesus in the second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth* (24–52), I have shown that according to Jesus' understanding of history, a "time of the Gentiles" comes between the destruction of the temple and the end of the world. At first, of course, its length was considered to be very short. But as part of the history of God and man, this time is essential (45–49). Although this period of God's dealings with the world is not directly evident as such in the texts of the Old Testament, it does correspond to the unfolding of the hope of Israel. This becomes more and more evident in the later period (Deutero-Isaiah, Zechariah, etc.).

St. Luke tells us that Jesus, the Risen One, on the way with two disciples, also led them on an interior journey. He reads, as it were, the Old Testament anew with them. In this way, they learn to understand in an entirely new way the promises and hopes of Israel and the figure of the messiah. They discover that

the fate of the Crucified and Risen One, who mysteriously travels with the disciples, is foreshadowed in these books. They learn a new reading of the Old Testament. This text describes the formation of the Christian faith in the first and second centuries and thus describes a path that is always to be newly sought out and pursued. It also describes in essence the conversation between Jews and Christians as it should be up until today—a conversation that, unfortunately, has occurred only in rare moments.

The fathers were well aware of this new structuring of history when, for example, they described the movement of history according to the threefold scheme of *umbra—imago—veritas*. The time of the Church (the "time of the Gentiles") is not yet the arrival of open *veritas* (= Is 2 and Mi 4). It is still *imago*; that is, it still stands in the interim, albeit in a new openness. Bernard of Clairvaux correctly portrayed this when he changed the account of the twofold advent of Christ into a threefold presence of the Lord, calling the time of the Church an *Adventus medius* (*Jesus of Nazareth*, part two, 290–91).

In summary, we can say that the whole story of Jesus as told in the New Testament—from the account of the temptations to the story of Emmaus—shows that the time of Jesus, the "time of the Gentiles," is not a time of cosmic transformation in which the final decisions between God and man are already complete, but a time of freedom. In this time God encounters mankind through the crucified love of Jesus Christ in order to gather them into the kingdom of God through a free yes. It is the time of freedom, and that also means a time in which evil continues to have power. God's power during this time is a power of patience and love that remains effective against the power of evil. It is a time of God's patience, which is often too great for us—a time of victories, but also a time when love and truth are defeated. The ancient Church summed up the essence of this time in the saying "*Regnavit a ligno Deus*" ["God reigns from a tree"]. In being on the road with Jesus like the Emmaus disciples, the Church is constantly learning to read the Old Testament with him and thus to understand anew. She learns to recognize that this is precisely what was predicted about the "messiah." And, in dialogue with the Jews, she tries again and again to show that all this is "scriptural." Because of this, spiritual theology has always emphasized that the time of the Church is not about

arriving in paradise, but corresponds to a forty-year exodus of Israel worldwide. It is the path of those who are liberated. In the wilderness Israel was repeatedly reminded that its journey through the desert is the result of liberation from the bondage of Egypt. As Israel on the way always wished to return to Egypt, and could not recognize the good of freedom as good, the same goes for Christianity in its Exodus journey. Again and again, it becomes difficult to recognize the mystery of liberation and freedom as a gift of salvation, and there is desire to return to the condition that preceded liberation. But time and again, through the mercies of God, they can learn that freedom is the great gift that leads to true life.

3.5. The promise of land

The promise of land is intended concretely for the children of Abraham as a people existing in history. Christians understand themselves as true descendants of Abraham (as impressively described, above all, in the Letter to the Galatians), but not as a people in the earthly-historical sense. They are a people existing among all the nations. As such they do not expect any particular country in this world. The Letter to the Hebrews expressly describes this understanding of the promise of land: "By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of the promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents . . . heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city . . . whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:9f). "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb 11:13). The *Letter to Diognetus* further elaborates this view: Christians live in their respective countries as responsible citizens, knowing that the true city, the actual country to which they are going, lies in the future. The promise of land refers to the future world and relativizes the different affiliations to particular countries. The dialectic of responsibly belonging to this world and at the same time being on a journey determines the Christian understanding of land and nationality. This must, of course, always be newly worked through, suffered, and experienced.

On the other hand, Judaism adhered to the idea of the concrete descent from Abraham and thus necessarily had to search again and again for a concrete inner-worldly meaning for the promise of land.

The failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 AD), which was theologically supported by parts of the rabbinate, meant for a long time a renunciation of such forms of political messianism. On the other hand, Maimonides (1135–1204) took a new direction in that he sought to ground the expectation of land in theology, in order to give it a rational form. However, a concrete reality did not emerge until the 19th century. The suffering of the large Jewish minority in Galicia as throughout the East became the starting point for Theodor Herzl to found Zionism, which aimed again to give a home to the displaced, poor, and suffering Jews. The events of the Shoah made a state of their own an even more urgent matter for the Jews. In the decaying Ottoman Empire, to which the Holy Land belonged, it had to be possible to make the historical homeland of the Jews once again their own. At the same time, there was a broad spectrum of internal reasons and concrete visions. A majority of Zionists were unbelievers, and it was under secular conditions that they made the land a home for the Jewish people. But religious forces were also always at work in Zionism, and to the surprise of agnostic fathers, a devotion to religion has often arisen in the new generation. The question of what to make of the Zionist project was also controversial for the Catholic Church. From the beginning, however, the dominant position was that a theologically-understood acquisition of land (in the sense of a new political messianism) was unacceptable. After the establishment of Israel as a country in 1948, a theological doctrine emerged that eventually enabled the political recognition of the State of Israel by the Vatican. At its core is the conviction that a strictly theologically-understood state—a Jewish faith-state [*Glaubensstaat*] that would view itself as the theological and political fulfillment of the promises—is unthinkable within history according to Christian faith and contrary to the Christian understanding of the promises. At the same time, however, it was made clear that the Jewish people, like every people, had a natural right to their own land. As already indicated, it made sense to find the place for it in the historical dwelling place of the Jewish people. In

the political situation of the collapsing Ottoman Empire and the British protectorate, this could be found in a manner consistent with the standards of international law. In this sense, the Vatican has recognized the State of Israel as a modern constitutional state, and sees it as a legitimate home of the Jewish people, the rationale of which cannot be derived directly from Holy Scripture. Yet, in another sense, it expresses God's faithfulness to the people of Israel.

The nontheological character of the Jewish state means, however, that it cannot as such be considered the fulfillment of the promises of Scripture. Rather, the course of history shows a growth and unfolding of the promises, as we have seen in relation to the other dimensions of the promise. Already in the first great diaspora of Israel under King Nebuchadnezzar, God's love for his people was at work in the midst of judgment and gave a new, positive meaning to the diaspora. It was only in exile that Israel's image of God, monotheism, was fully developed. According to the usual standards, a god who could not defend his country was no longer a god. In contrast to the ridicule of the people who represented Israel's God as vanquished and landless, it now became clear that precisely in giving away the land, the divinity of God is revealed—a God who is not only God of a particular country, but a God to whom the world as a whole belonged. He exercises dominion over the world and can newly redistribute according to his will. Thus Israel, in exile, has finally realized that their God is a God above the gods, who freely disposes of history and nations.

The Hellenistic persecution of Judaism was, in its own opinion, based on an enlightened image of God, which in principle should be uniform for all educated people. Thus there was no room for the particularity and the election of Israel by God. And yet, in the dispute between Greek polytheism and the one God of heaven and the earth whom Israel served, among the God-seeking people of antiquity there emerged an unexpected devotion to the God of Israel. The concrete expression of this is the movement of "God-fearers" who gathered around synagogues. In my dissertation *Volk und Haus Gottes bei Augustin* [*People and House of God According to Augustine*], following the analysis of Augustine, I tried to clarify the inner reasons for this process. The essence of the whole can perhaps be summarized as follows: ancient thought had finally arrived at an opposition between the

deity worshipped in religion and the real structure of the world. The religious deities had to be rejected as ultimately unreal, and the real power, which created and indwelt the world, appeared to be religiously irrelevant.

In this situation, the Jewish God appeared as both the primordial power of all being (as philosophy had discovered), and, at the same time, as a religious force that addressed man in his concreteness and that allowed man to encounter the divine.

This coincidence of a philosophical idea and religious reality was something new and could make religion again a rationally-justifiable reality. The only thing that stood in the way was God binding himself to a single people and its legal system. If, as in the preaching of Paul, this bond were to be loosened and the God of the Jews could be regarded by all as their God, the reconciliation of faith and reason had been achieved (see also my short book *Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen*).

In this way, the Jews have opened the door to God precisely through their final scattering in the world. Their diaspora is not merely and not primarily a condition of punishment; instead, it signifies a mission.

4. THE "NEVER-REVOKED COVENANT"

With all that has been said so far, we have commented on the first basic element of the new consensus on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism as presented in the reflections issued by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. This first basic element states that the "theory of substitution" is not suitable for the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. We studied this thesis in terms of the basic elements that make up the election of Israel. We came to the conclusion that the critique of the theory of substitution indeed points in the right direction, but must be considered anew in its details. Now we must turn to the second element of this new consensus, that is, the language of the "never-revoked covenant."

The "Reflection" mentioned above points out that the thesis that "the covenant that God made with his people Israel perdures and is never invalidated" (no. 39) is not included in *Nostra aetate*. It was pronounced for the first time by John Paul II

on November 17, 1980 in Mainz. It has since been included in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 121) and thus belongs in a certain sense to the current teaching of the Catholic Church.

As was the case with the critique of the theory of substitution, the core of what is said here should regarded as correct, but some details need to be clarified and deepened. First of all, it should be noted that in the enumeration of the special gifts of Israel in Romans 4, Paul does not speak of the "covenant" but of "covenants." In fact, it is unfortunate that our theology generally sees covenant only in the singular, or perhaps only in a strict juxtaposition of Old (First) and New Covenant. For the Old Testament, "covenant" is a dynamic reality that is concretized in an unfolding series of covenants. I mention as the main forms: the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and finally, in various guises, the promise of the New Covenant.

The prologue of Matthew's gospel and the infancy narrative in St. Luke both make a claim about the Davidic covenant. Each shows in its own way how the covenant was broken by man and came to an end. But they also show how God causes a branch to grow out of the stump of Jesse, thus giving a new beginning to the covenant with God (cf. Is 11:1). The Davidic dynasty comes to an end like all earthly dynasties. And yet the promise is fulfilled: his kingdom will have no end (Lk 1:33).

The Letter to the Galatians is important for our question: chapters three and four draw a comparison between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant is described as universal and unconditional. The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, was ratified 430 years later. It is limited and bound up with the condition of fulfilling the law. This also means, however, that it can fail where the conditions are not fulfilled. It has an intermediate function, but it does not abrogate the definitiveness and the universality of the Abrahamic covenant.

A new stage of covenant theology can be found in the Letter to the Hebrews, which takes up the promise of the new covenant (announced with particular clarity in Jer 31) and compares it with previous covenants. These are all gathered together under the heading of the "first covenant," which is now replaced by the final, "new" covenant.

The theme of the new covenant appears in different variations in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, and Hosea. Particularly impressive is the description of the love story between God and Israel in the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. God lovingly takes Israel unto himself in its time of youth in a covenant of love, which is meant to be definitive. Israel does not remain faithful and prostitutes itself with all kinds of deities. God's anger over this is not his last word. Instead, he takes Israel in a new and indestructible covenant. The language of the "never-revoked covenant" that we are examining is correct insofar as there is no denunciation on the part of God. But it is true that a breach of the covenant on the part of man belongs to the actual history between God and Israel. The first form of this is described in the Book of Exodus. The long absence of Moses becomes an occasion for the people to give themselves a visible god, whom they adore: "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to enjoy themselves" (Ex 32:6). Upon returning, "Moses saw that the people had broken loose" (Ex 32:25). In the face of the broken covenant, Moses threw down the tablets that God himself had inscribed and broke them (Ex 32:19). God's mercy indeed returned the tablets to Israel, but they are always at the same time replacement tablets and also warning signs that recall the broken covenant.

What does that mean for our question? On the one hand, the covenant between God and Israel is indestructible because of the continuity of God's election. But at the same time, it is codetermined by the whole drama of human error. Of course, given the infinite difference between the covenant partners, the word "covenant" cannot be understood in the sense of equal partners. The inequality of the two partners makes the covenant look more like the Oriental model in the sense of receiving grants from the great king. This is also expressed in the linguistic form: the partnership word *syntheke* is not used. Instead, *diatheke* is chosen, which is why the Letter to the Hebrews does not speak of "covenant" but of "testament." Accordingly, the sacred books are generally not called Old and New Covenant, but Old (New) and New Testament.

The whole journey of God with his people finally finds its summary and final figure in the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, which anticipates and carries within itself the Cross and Resurrection. We do not need to discuss the complicated problems of

the formation of the two traditions: Mark and Matthew on the one hand, and Luke and Paul on the other. In one case, the Sinai tradition is taken up. What has happened there comes to definitive fulfillment here. Accordingly, the promise of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 is now a present reality. The Sinai covenant was by its very nature always a promise, an approach to what is final. After all destruction, the new covenant is the love of God that goes as far as the death of the Son.

Let us now try to come to a final judgment on the formula of the "never-revoked covenant." We first raised two linguistic objections. The word "revoke" does not belong to the vocabulary of divine action. As used to describe the story of God's history with mankind, "covenant" in the Bible is not singular, but occurs in stages. Now, beyond these formal objections, we must say critically in terms of content that this formula does not bring to the fore the real drama of the story between God and man. Yes, God's love is indestructible. But the covenant history between God and man also includes human failure, the breaking of the covenant and its internal consequences: the destruction of temple, the scattering of Israel, and the call to repentance, which restores man's capacity for the covenant. The love of God cannot simply ignore man's no. It wounds God himself and thus necessarily man too. If God's wrath and the severity of his punishments are described in the books of the prophets as well as in the Torah, then it is necessary to keep in mind that God's punitive actions become a suffering for himself. It is not the end of his love, but a new level of love. I would like to quote here a single text in which this intertwining of anger and love and therein the definitiveness of love becomes clear. After all the preceded threats, the saving love of God in all its greatness appears in Hosea 11:7–9: "My people are bent on turning away from me. They call Baal, but he does not help them at all. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? . . . My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim." Between the guilt of man and the threat of final defeat lies the suffering of God: "My heart recoils within me; . . . for I am God and no mortal . . . and I will not come in wrath." What is said here in an enormous and terrifying way is realized in the eucharistic

words of Jesus Christ: he gives himself unto death and in Resurrection opens the New Covenant.

The reestablishment of the Sinai covenant in the New Covenant in Jesus' blood—that is, in his love that vanquishes death—gives the covenant a new and permanently valid form. Jesus responds in advance to the two historical events that shortly afterward fundamentally changed the situation of Israel and the concrete form of the Sinai covenant: the destruction of the temple, which proved more and more irrevocable, and the scattering of Israel in a worldwide diaspora. Here we touch on the "essence" of Christianity and on the "essence" of Judaism, which in turn developed an answer to these events in Talmud and Mishnah. How can the covenant be lived? This is the question that has separated the concrete reality of the Old Testament into two paths, Judaism and Christianity.

The formula of the "never-revoked covenant" may have been helpful in a first phase of the new dialogue between Jews and Christians. But it is not suited in the long run to express in an adequate way the magnitude of reality. If brief formulas are considered necessary, I would refer above all to two words of Holy Scripture in which the essentials find valid expression. With regard to the Jews, Paul says: "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). To all, Scripture says, "if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tm 2:12f).—*Translated by Nicholas J. Healy Jr.* □

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