

The Problem of the Two-Covenant Theology

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Jesus says, according to John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.”

In Jesus’ parable about the prodigal son, the father in the parable says to his eldest son, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (Luke 15:31).

Franz Rosenzweig says, with an allusion to John 14:6 and Luke 15:31:

We are wholly agreed as to what Christ and his church mean to the world: no one can reach the Father save through him.

No one can reach the Father! But the situation is quite different for one who does not have to reach the Father because he is already with him. And this is true of the people of Israel (though not of individual Jews).⁸³

The Issue

Above is a quotation by Franz Rosenzweig, a Jewish philosopher who died in 1929. I contend that if we understand his method of argument, it will be easy to see through similar arguments in others. This is even true regarding those representatives of two-covenant theology whose theological and philosophical bases differ from Rosenzweig’s but whose argument can nevertheless be compared to his. They also arrive at solutions of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity similar to those he suggested. This approach implies that this essay will conclude with a few clues that elucidate the Christological consequences for Christian advocates of two-covenant theology.

The crux is: What is the theological foundation of the view that the gospel of and by Jesus is for non-Jews *only*? And is it possible to maintain the New Testament’s view of Jesus if two-covenant theology is recognized?

That is the very heart of the matter!

It is true that the doctrine of the two covenants to many has the ring of “Good News.” At long last a solution has been found to the difficult relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Both religions are equal, both are willed by the same God, and both have a divine mission in the world. The Christian Church need no longer have a bad conscience because it has failed to bring the gospel to the Jews so that they would believe in Jesus. The Church has been released from what it used to believe was its obligation. And this has happened, not through a prohibition, but — it

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⁸³ Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Stocken Books, 1953), p. 341.

seems — thanks to a positive theological argument. And if it is possible to talk about superiority here, it is no longer the question of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism but, on the contrary, the superiority of Judaism over Christianity.

It is not difficult to understand why a great many Jews subscribe to the idea of a double covenant. The “second” covenant does not really challenge their position. Nor is it very difficult to understand why liberal and radical Christian theologians support this view, if one considers how these have reduced and transformed Jesus in relation to the New Testament. Still, this theory has gained advocates among evangelical Christians. Although most Jews state that they do not missionize and do not have a need to missionize among non-Jews, they have nevertheless, to a certain degree, succeeded in convincing many Christians that Jews have their own covenant with God, which for them makes belief in Jesus unnecessary. That is also a kind of “mission.” Unlike some Jews who do not recognize the Christian Church’s right to missionize Jews, I fully recognize the Jewish people’s right to influence Christians and fight for the truth of which they, as Jews, are convinced. To fight for the “truth” *with arguments* is a human right. I am even impressed with the efficiency achieved by Jews involved in the Jewish-Christian dialogue in asserting that Jews have no need for faith in Jesus. Seen against that background, it is no wonder that Jews, involved in this dialogue, urge Christians to give their testimony only within the framework of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.⁸⁴ So far, what testimony there may have been within that framework has proved a relatively harmless affair for Jews.

In the Old Testament there are several successive covenants between God and Israel, and prior to these covenants there was the covenant between God and Noah, which included the whole of mankind (Gen 9:9-11). Among the so-called unconditional covenants we find the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant, which the prophet Jeremiah — and others — refer to (Jer 31). On the other hand the Mosaic covenant is a conditional one.⁸⁵

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that in the Hebrew Bible — e.g. in the prophet Jeremiah — a new covenant is anticipated. No matter what the relationship was between the earlier covenants and the new covenant, there is something “more,” something more “far-reaching,” or at least a “renewal” in the new covenant. These vague expressions have been chosen with a purpose: I want to point out that Jews and Christians who want to take the prophet Jeremiah seriously can share the idea of a new covenant, although there is also here some difference of opinion. According to a Christian viewpoint one aspect of the covenant is already in effect. Barry R. Leventhal says that

when the Lord instituted the Lord’s Supper, He did not apply all of the provisions in the New covenant. He only applied the single provision of the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:27-28). All of the various provisions await their ultimate fulfillment in Israel’s Messianic kingdom.⁸⁶

It has often been argued by Jews that one cannot see that the promised redemption has come with Jesus. The response to this may be that the New Testament admits the presence of a tension:

⁸⁴ See Yechiel Eckstein, *What You Should Know about Jews and Judaism* (Waco, Texas: Word Books 1984) p. 321.

⁸⁵ For a discussion of the various covenants, cf. Barry R. Leventhal, “Theological Perspectives on the Holocaust, Part Two”, in *Mishkan* nos. 8&9, I+II/1989, pp. 79-117.

⁸⁶ Leventhal, pp. 98-99.

redemption *has* come with Jesus and yet the ultimate redemption still belongs to the future. Oscar Cullmann describes this tension as “already fulfilled” and “not yet completed.”⁸⁷

When the New Testament mentions the “new covenant,” there can be no doubt that it is a reference to the covenant mentioned by Jeremiah. Furthermore, no matter how the New Testament writers look upon covenant and election, it does not challenge the fundamental concept that the new covenant in Jesus includes Jews. On the basis of this one observation, it seems as if two-covenant theology has embarked on a collision course with one principal New Testament concept. Substantially, the new covenant in the New Testament is combined with the concept of redemption through Jesus’ death and the resulting forgiveness of sins for all — Jews as well as non-Jews. That at least some Jews today seem to have diverged radically from the Hebrew Bible’s idea of atonement is perhaps understandable, as the Jews no longer have a place of sacrifice.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, a Christian cannot help being surprised when some Jews argue that they do not need a “covenant of grace.” Marc Angel is quite unambiguous: “Judaism does not teach that one must be ‘saved’ by a special act of God’s grace.”⁸⁹ And, in the same context, “Any suggestion by Christians that God’s covenant with Israel has been transferred to a ‘new Israel’ is obviously offensive to Jewish belief.”⁹⁰ It is probably equally “offensive” to argue, that God has *not* annulled his covenant with Israel, but that with *Jesus* a renewed covenant has been established which is also for Jews, and that if there is such a thing as a “new Israel” it consists of Jesus-believing Jews living in the renewed covenant, and that non-Jews, by God’s grace and for Jesus’ sake, have been allowed to share its benefits.

The Apostle Paul makes the point in Romans 9-11 that even if Israel as a people has rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God’s election is irrevocable. For Paul — often the butt of abuse by Jews as well as Christians — Israel’s election has not been annulled, even though they have not received Jesus as Messiah. Israel continues to have a place in God’s plan of salvation. But this belief does not cause Paul to refrain from proclaiming the gospel of Jesus to Jews.

That the issue of two-covenant theology is of more than academic interest and indeed a delicate question among many Jews and some Christians, will now be shown with an example.

The Positions

In evangelical circles involved in Jewish evangelism today it is affirmed that the people of Israel are God’s covenant-people and that the Jewish people have an ongoing part in God’s plan;⁹¹ but they deny that this covenant renders faith in Jesus unnecessary for Jews. The obligation to take back the gospel to the Jewish people is still in force.

In Jewish circles it is affirmed that God’s covenant with the people of Israel has not been

⁸⁷ Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 172.

⁸⁸ See also Louis Goldberg, *Are Their Two Ways of Atonement?* (Baltimore: Lederer Publications, 1990), pp. 27-30.

⁸⁹ Marc Angel, "Covenant", in Leon Klenicki & Geoffrey Wigoder, *A Dictionary of the Jewish - Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 37.

⁹⁰ Angel, p. 36.

⁹¹ "The Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People", Article III.12. The Declaration is printed in *Mishkan* no. 11, II/1989, pp. 76-84.

annulled, and as a rule it is denied that this covenant can include faith in Jesus for Jews; some Jews recognize that non-Jews can reach the Father through Jesus. The Christians have no obligation to preach the gospel to the Jewish people — and certainly not after the Holocaust.

The evangelical position was expressed in two important documents in 1989. The shorter version is to be found in the *Manila Manifesto* from Lausanne II in Manila. With a clear reference to the so-called two-covenant theology the Manifesto has the following to say:

It is sometimes held that in virtue of God's covenant with Abraham, Jewish people do not need to acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. We affirm that they need him as much as anyone else, that it would be a form of anti-Semitism, as well as being disloyal to Christ, to depart from the New Testament pattern of taking the gospel to "the Jew first...". We therefore reject the thesis that Jews have their own covenant which renders faith in Jesus unnecessary.⁹²

The longer statement is to be found in the document *The Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People*, which was made in April 1989. The Willowbank Declaration is introduced with two Scripture texts from Paul's Letter to the Romans: "The Gospel is the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16), and "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1). With these references to Paul, the Jesus-believing Jew, a clear signal has been given that the gospel is a message *for* Jews. In the preamble to the Declaration this is developed with the following statement:

Some church leaders have retreated from embracing the task of evangelizing Jews as a responsibility of Christian mission. Rather, a new theology is being embraced which holds that God's covenant with Israel through Abraham establishes all Jews in God's favor for all times, and so makes faith in Jesus Christ for salvation needless so far as they are concerned.

On this basis, it is argued that dialogue with Jews in order to understand each other better, and cooperation in the quest for socio-economical shalom, is all that Christian mission requires in relation to the Jewish people. Continued attempts to do what the Church has done from the first, in seeking to win Jews to Jesus as Messiah, are widely opposed and decried by Christian as well as Jewish leaders.⁹³

The reactions to this declaration were prompt. In an interview Rabbi A. James Rudin, National Director of Inter-Religious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, called the Declaration a "blueprint for spiritual genocide that is shot through with the ancient Christian 'teaching of contempt' for Jews and Judaism."⁹⁴ Elsewhere Rudin refers to the Declaration as "wrong-headed" and "arrogant."⁹⁵ Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, describes the Declaration as "retrograde and primitive."⁹⁶ In an article entitled "Jewish Leaders Call on Evangelicals to Repudiate Their Conversion Goals"

⁹² Cf. *Mishkan* no. 11, II/1989, p. 85.

⁹³ *Mishkan* no. 11, pp. 77-78.

⁹⁴ Darell Turner, "Evangelical Statement Stresses Importance of Witness to Jews", in *Religious News Service*, 9 May 1989.

⁹⁵ Peter Steinfel, "Evangelical Group Urges Conversion of Jews", in *New York Times*, 21 May 1989.

⁹⁶ "Ecumenical Debate: Preaching Jesus While Respecting Other Faiths", in *Los Angeles Times*, 27 May 1989.

Schindler is quoted as labeling the Declaration “a desperate attempt to stop the clock of progress in inter-religious relations.” Rudin calls the Declaration “the worst kind of Christian religious imperialism.”⁹⁷

It is possible that Rudin’s mention of “spiritual genocide” has a certain effect on Christians who are weighed down by guilt caused by the awareness of the Christian Church’s crimes against Jews down through history. The Christian Church, including the part of it that is engaged in mission to the Jews, cannot possibly ask Jews to forget history, even though the Christians in question have no personal responsibility for the Holocaust. History endows a people with an identity. But when Christians help to preserve the memory of the church’s bloody history with the Jewish people and *at the same time* speak about the church’s obligation to take the gospel to the Jewish people, then they have chosen the most difficult solution imaginable. Less radical solutions either belittle the Church’s history and behave as if the Holocaust is only a problem for Jewish people, or they belittle the Lord of the Church who has obliged his Church to mission — to all peoples. The choice of the difficult solution is a signal to those who have ears to hear that mission to Jews is not an easy task and that it cannot be carried out in a triumphalistic way.

When Rudin refers to the Willowbank Declaration as a “blueprint for spiritual genocide,” it is an exceedingly sharp statement against what the Christian Church regards as an obligation, entrusted to it by the Lord of the Church — namely that the gospel *is* for Jews and therefore should be preached to Jews. It is worth noting that Rudin does not just attack a *way* of evangelizing. The *ways and methods* in Jewish evangelism are of course not above criticism.

When genuine Christian theology, in the face of great difficulties, maintains that Jews need Jesus, it is not an idea that originated with gentile Christians. This idea is deeply rooted in that gospel which non-Jews received from Jews and which to Jews and gentiles alike is folly (1 Cor 1:22-25). I refer to that gospel which first came to Jews, and whose principal character is Jesus, the Jew.

Evangelical theology is therefore of the opinion that neither the Jew Jesus nor the Jew Paul wanted to cause a “spiritual genocide.” It is possible to understand the harsh words against Jews in the New Testament within the framework of Jewish debate and self-criticism, which rules out that those words are anti-Semitic. If they were anti-Semitic, the criticism leveled against the covenant-people in the Hebrew Bible by several Jewish prophets would also have to be stamped as such. The book dealing with, on the one hand, Jewish prophetic self-criticism and Jewish movements’ criticism of fellow Jews immediately before and after the fall of the Second Temple, and on the other hand, the so-called anti-Judaistic or anti-Semitic statements in the New Testament has not yet been written.

The following is an attempt to investigate what, according to New Testament theology, is at stake when the so-called two-covenant theology is accepted.

Franz Rosenzweig and Two-Covenant Theology

⁹⁷ In Chicago *Jewish Sentinel*, 8 June 1989. The references in notes 12-15 are available in Tuvia Zaretsky, “A Report: Response To the Willowbank Declaration”, presented at the LCJE meeting in St. Louis, 15 March 1990.

Hardly any Jew before Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) ever spoke with such appreciation of *Christianity* and *the Christian Church*. Rosenzweig had a positive attitude regarding the Church's role in the world. Therefore he has been extremely influential in the development of the doctrine of the two covenants.

The path Rosenzweig had to walk to arrive at his positive attitude toward Christianity and the Church's importance for non-Jews cannot but make a certain impression. A person who through his struggle with himself and his God at last finds himself in his own tradition — while retaining faith in his God — commands our respect and sympathy. Rosenzweig is that man. His principal work, *The Star of Redemption*, which he began writing on army postal cards at the end of August 1918 on the Balkan Front is the expression of a personal need and is not determined by “objective, theoretical speculations,” as mentioned by Nahum N. Glatzer.⁹⁸

Raised in an assimilated Jewish home in Germany, Rosenzweig found his way back to his Jewish heritage. In 1914 he finished his doctoral thesis entitled *Hegel und der Staat* (published 1920). While at university he had thoroughgoing discussions about Judaism and Christianity with Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, professor of law and sociology, and with his two cousins Hans and Rudolf Ehrenberg, who had both become Christians and who made a strong impression on Rosenzweig.

The result of these conversations was that Rosenzweig, in 1913, was convinced that he ought to be baptized. A conversation with Rosenstock had led him from his “relativistic position into a non-relativistic one.”⁹⁹ But he declared that he could turn Christian only “*qua* Jew — not through the intermediate stage of paganism.” While talking to his mother, who realized that he planned to be baptized, he pointed to the New Testament which he was holding in his hand: “Mother, here is everything, here is the truth. There is only one way, Jesus.”¹⁰⁰

However, it did not end with baptism. On 11 October 1913 he celebrated Yom Kippur in a small synagogue in Berlin. What was supposed to have been a farewell to Judaism became the inauguration of a new life for him *as a Jew*. The service on the Day of Atonement revolutionized his life, or, in the words of Nahum N. Glatzer: “What that day conveyed to him was that essential as a mediator may be in the Christian experience, the Jews stand in no need of a mediator. God is near to a man and desires his undeviated devotion.”¹⁰¹ Franz Rosenzweig, the “near-believer” became “a traditional Jew,” as Louis Goldberg puts it.¹⁰²

By birth Franz Rosenzweig *was* a Jew. He did not *become* a Jew. But he became aware of what he already was, namely a Jew.

For Rosenzweig, the difference between Jews and non-Jews is that the Jew, because he is a descendant of Abraham, does not need to be reborn, which non-Jews need. The Jew is born a Jew.

⁹⁸ Nahum N. Glatzer, “Introduction”, in Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. x.

⁹⁹ Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 23-24.

¹⁰⁰ Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 25. For a recent monograph which positively supports Rosenzweig's view of Jesus and the importance of the Church for Gentiles, see Ronald H. Miller, *Dialogue and Disagreement. Franz Rosenzweig's Relevance to Contemporary Jewish-Christian Understanding* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1989).

¹⁰¹ Nahum N. Glatzer, “Franz Rosenzweig”, in *Great Twentieth Century Jewish Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Books, 1985), p. 162; cf. Louis Goldberg, p. 7.

¹⁰² Louis Goldberg, p. 6.

It is different with the pagans. When a non-Jew receives Jesus he is reborn. “A Christian is made, not born.” As for the Jew, “the individual is born a Jew. He no longer needs to become one in some decisive moment of his individual life.”¹⁰³ The fundamental difference between Jewish and Christian is that “the Christian is by nature or at least by birth — a pagan; the Jew, however, is a Jew.”¹⁰⁴ A Jew is born into the faith-community that was instituted between God and Israel on Sinai, it is a natural phenomenon; in contrast, pagans have to undergo a rebirth.

As complementary entities Judaism as well as Christianity have a God-willed function in the world. Rosenzweig has the following to say about this:

Before God, then, the Jew and Christian both labor at the same task. He cannot dispense with either. He has set enmity between the two for all time, and withal has most intimately bound each to each. To us (Jews) he gave eternal life by kindling the fire of the Star of his truth in our hearts. Them (the Christians) he set on the eternal way by causing them to pursue the rays of that Star of his truth for all time unto the eternal end.

In the same passage Rosenzweig goes on to say: “The truth, the whole truth, thus belongs neither to them (the Christians) nor to us.” But this does not challenge his position that Judaism is superior to Christianity as the Star is primary in relation to the rays. The Christians “are in any event already destined for all time to see what is illuminated, and not the light.”¹⁰⁵ But it is exactly Christianity’s inherent “paganism”¹⁰⁶ that qualifies the Christian to convert the pagans. “The Christian credo had to accommodate itself to a pagan impulse in order to win over the pagans, and this impulse is quenched by the worship of God in the Spirit and the truth, by the promise that Spirit would lead Christendom.”¹⁰⁷ While Judaism does not need to missionize, it only needs to be, and is already, a testimony of God through its very being; this is not so with Christianity. “Christianity must proselytize.”¹⁰⁸

But Christianity holds no decisive message for Jews. To Rosenzweig, Jewish Christians have only a historical right as an early-church phenomenon and a dogmatic right in Christian eschatology. He argues the first case is an anachronism, and the last a paradox.¹⁰⁹

Comments on Rosenzweig’s Theory and its Further Development

1. “The pride of the Jew”

Whatever positive opinions Rosenzweig may hold of Christianity, Rosenzweig does not hide his pride in Judaism, which derived from his conviction that as a Jew he knows the truth. Rosenzweig says about this:

The metaphysical reason for this pride can be formulated thus: (1) that we know the truth; (2) that we

¹⁰³ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 396.

¹⁰⁴ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 407.

¹⁰⁵ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, pp. 415-416.

¹⁰⁶ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 350.

¹⁰⁷ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 399.

¹⁰⁸ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 341.

¹⁰⁹ *Franz Rosenzweig / Briefe*, ed. by Edith Rosenzweig (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1935), p. 553.

have reached the goal; (3) that at the bottom of his heart any Jew will consider the Christian's relationship to God, and hence his religion, a meager and roundabout affair. For to the Jew it is incomprehensible that one should need a teacher, be he who he may, to learn what is obvious and a matter of course to him, namely to call our God our Father. Why should a third person have to be between me and my Father in heaven? This is no invention of modern apologists but simply Jewish instinct.¹¹⁰

The theological content of the quotation, not least point three, reveals Rosenzweig's views of man and his sin, of Jesus' redemptive death and of the nature of salvation, all of them views whereby he places himself in remarkable contrast to the first Jesus-believing Jews. The question suggests itself if it is "only" through a "reduced" Jesus of this kind that non-Jews can come to the Father. It is also worth noting that even if Rosenzweig sees the interrelationship of the two religions, Judaism and Christianity, as that of complement, then this is "one of unequals in his scheme," as John T. Pawlikowski¹¹¹ very properly states. While it becomes a reason for Pawlikowski to reject Rosenzweig's model, for me it becomes something positive that a person who has a living faith expresses himself in the terms that Rosenzweig uses. It is not offensive to me, a Christian, that a Jew — or anybody else — thinks that he is in possession of the truth and that his faith is superior to mine. On the contrary, it is something I respect. But then I also expect Jews not to feel offended when I tell them that I know the truth because I believe in Jesus, who said about himself that he was the Truth.

2. Many ways to the same destination

Even with a different point of departure it is possible to reach a result which is similar to Franz Rosenzweig's. Martin Buber is an example of a philosopher with a different point of departure. In the course of his conversation with the Christian professor Karl-Ludwig Schmidt in 1933 Buber said: "God's doors are open for all. In order to come to God, the Christian need not go through Judaism nor the Jew through Christianity."¹¹² C.G. Montefiore may be adduced as an example of the tolerance of a liberal Judaism. He writes, in 1930:

Both the "righteousness" of the Rabbis and the "righteousness" of Jesus are excellent righteousnesses. Each thought that the other was quite inadequate for the entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet surely here were Jesus and the Rabbis equally in error: For both righteousnesses, honestly pursued, are acceptable unto God.¹¹³

3. Rosenzweig's symbolic world

In an article from 1931 Gerschom Scholem compares Rosenzweig's symbolic world to "mystical astronomy." Few works have been as provocative as *The Star of Redemption* since the appearance of the *Guide of the Perplexed* or the *Zohar*. In this work there is "something new," indeed, "it challenged us and, why not admit it, perplexed us," Scholem says. He finds that

¹¹⁰ Rosenzweig: *The Star of Redemption*, pp. 346-347.

¹¹¹ John T. Pawlikowski, *What Are They Saying About Christian-Jewish Relations?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 89.

¹¹² Cf. Mitch Glaser, "Critique of The Two Covenant Theory", *Mishkan* no. 11, II/1989, p. 53.

¹¹³ C.G. Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching* (London: 1930), p. 201.

Rosenzweig's new interpretation of the world stands in opposition to the classical theology of a Maimonides or a Hasdai Crescas.

To begin with it moves from the position of reason to a theistic mysticism and gives support to strictly mystical theologoumena ... More important, it dares as well to set in the center of its theological anthropology a comparative analysis of Judaism and Christianity which ends in a *non liquet*, and therefore with a dictum that from the point of view of orthodoxy must seem rash and nearly blasphemous.¹¹⁴

4. Rosenzweig's metahistoric religion

About Rosenzweig's view of Judaism, Nahum N. Glatzer writes: "As a metahistoric religion, Judaism cannot be known by its external fate and by its external expressions. It can be understood from within only. 'For now', Rosenzweig writes to Eugen Rosenstock, 'I would have to show you Judaism from within, that is, in a hymn.'"¹¹⁵

From his own Christian stance, John T. Pawlikowski finds that Rosenzweig in basically removing the Jewish people from the historical process, "does violence, to one of the basic hallmarks of the Jewish spirit — its rootedness in the flow of history which is the locus of human salvation."¹¹⁶

Arthur A. Cohen is one of Rosenzweig's Jewish critics who is not any milder in his criticism:

Rosenzweig, seeking as he did to ground a metaphysics which was structurally prior to faith and, in fact, demanded faith as a noetic principle, was obliged to ontologize historical realities. The Jews and the Christians cease in his analysis to be historical and become hypostatic. The Jew is beyond time and history, eternally present with God, and, therefore, always symbolically at the End, living in the condition of redemption. And though such a Jew is redeemed, his redemption is not complete since it is redemption through revelation, and creation remains, as it was before, untransformed. It is the Christian, always on his way from paganism to the Christ, who is bound to history and, by implication, whose task it is to unite creation with the *eschaton*. The Jew is the image of redemption which the Christian is obliged to pursue. Understandably, therefore, Rosenzweig suggests that the Parousia for the Christian may well be the first coming for the Jews, that the reconciliation will take place at the last moment when the Jew's virtual existence becomes actual in eternity and the Christian has been enabled by Christ to offer history back to God.¹¹⁷

5. Rosenzweig's terminology

When Rosenzweig speaks about redemption he is not dealing with the guilt of sin, as is the case in Christian theology. In 1913 he wrote, in a letter: "In the most important points, especially regarding the doctrine of sin, where I had most strongly disagreed before, I am now in complete agreement with Jewish doctrine."¹¹⁸ That Paul the Jew with his Jewish doctrine of sin, of

¹¹⁴ Gershom Scholem, "On the 1930 Edition of Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption", in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 320-324,

¹¹⁵ Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. xxii.

¹¹⁶ Pawlikowski, 1980, p. 90.

¹¹⁷ Arthur A. Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 210.

¹¹⁸ Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 28.

atonement and redemption in the blood of Jesus, in short with his doctrine of salvation, has a different view of these things should be evident against this background.

While it is true that Rosenzweig uses biblical terms, to him they have a different content than to the New Testament writers. While Rosenzweig the Jew thought that a Jew need not be reborn, Jesus said to Nicodemus the Jew that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born anew (John 3).

6. The abyss

It appears from what has been said above that to Rosenzweig there is an abyss between Christians and their Church, on the one hand, and every Jew on the other — “an abyss that will never be filled up.” And he continues: “That ‘connection of the innermost heart with God’ which the heathen can only reach through Jesus is something the Jew already possesses, provided that his Judaism is not withheld from him by force; he possesses it by nature, through having been born one of the Chosen People.” With all possible force Judaism has rejected “the notion that he has already arrived through whom their historic mission is to be fulfilled; it is still waiting for him and will continue to wait so long as there is Judaism. The development of Judaism has by-passed him whom the heathens call ‘Lord’ and by whom ‘they reach the Father’; it does not pass through him.”¹¹⁹

Advocates of two-covenant theology have diligently emphasized Rosenzweig’s positive view of the Church’s task. But they have not asserted with equal vigor that there seems to be an abyss between Rosenzweig’s understanding of the true nature of Christ’s mission and the New Testament’s understanding of it.

7. Rosenzweig’s doctrine: a step backward?

Emil L. Fachenheim is an example of Jewish rejection of Rosenzweig’s main thesis. He says:

I never could accept Rosenzweig’s famous “double covenant” doctrine, according to which all except Jews (who are already “with the Father”) need the Son in order to find Him. How can a modern Jew pray for the conversion of the whole non-Jewish world to Christianity when even pre-modern Jews could pay homage to Moslem monotheism?

Fachenheim also combines the issues of “double covenant” and Christian mission:

Rosenzweig’s doctrine seems altogether outmoded at a time when Christians themselves are beginning to replace missionary efforts with inter-religious dialogue, and I wonder whether even for Rosenzweig this doctrine was more than a stage in his self-emancipation from modern paganism.¹²⁰

“Rosenzweig’s scheme is not Church-oriented but Israel-oriented” (or even better perhaps: Judaism-oriented), which Maurice G. Bowler calls to our attention in connection with this quotation of Fachenheim and thereby rightly shows that in Rosenzweig the Church has been “brought into the picture in order to relate it to a centrally-placed Israel and not vice-versa.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 27.

¹²⁰ Emil L. Fachenheim, “Jewish Faith and the Holocaust”, in *Commentary*, August 1968, p. 33.

¹²¹ Maurice G. Bowler, “Rosenzweig on Judaism and Christianity”, *Mishkan no. 11*, II/1989, p. 3.

Preparatio Messianica and Maimonides

When the interrelationship of Judaism and Christianity is discussed today in the framework of a double covenant theology, Maimonides (1135-1204), the great Jewish medieval authority is often produced as an example of Judaism's positive attitude to Christianity. But often the problem becomes blurred. Whatever the reason may be, the explanation is not that Maimonides is not clear. When it comes to clarity, he surpasses most modern spokesmen for two-covenant theology.

Unlike some modern Jewish spokesmen of the double covenant, Maimonides does not turn Jesus into a Messiah for non-Jews. Jesus — and Mohammed — “served to clear the way for King Messiah.”¹²² In Maimonides it is an axiom that Jesus was not the Messiah, not for Jews and not for non-Jews. Both Jesus and Mohammed were false prophets.¹²³

Maimonides appreciated the achievement of the two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam; that is not debated. He is often quoted for these words:

It is beyond the human mind to fathom the designs of the Creator; for our ways are not His ways, neither are our thoughts His thoughts. All matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite (Mohammed) who came after him, served to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God with one accord, as it is written, *For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent* (Zeph 3:9). Thus the Messianic hope, the Torah, and the commandments have become familiar topics — topics of conversation (among the inhabitants) of the far isles and many people ... (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakhim XI,4*).¹²⁴

It is a matter open for debate whether his concession to the value of “all matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth” is not conditioned by the historical circumstances under which he lived rather than by his theology. But Maimonides' view of Christianity and Islam can also be seen in the light of a struggle for Jewish survival in confrontation with two religions which outnumbered Judaism and presented a danger to Jewish life.

Abraham Joshua Heschel realizes “that it was Christianity that implanted attachment to the God of Abraham and involvement with the Hebrew Bible in the hearts of Western man.”¹²⁵ No religion is an island, and therefore today religious isolationism is a myth. “Judaism is sooner or later affected by the intellectual, moral and spiritual events within the Christian society, and vice versa,” he argues. To him the choice is between “interfaith and inter-nihilism,” and he chooses the former.¹²⁶ With reference to leading Jewish authorities, such as Yehuda Halevi and Maimonides, who acknowledged “Christianity to be *preparatio messianica* (preparation for the Messiah), while the Church regarded ancient Judaism to have been a *preparatio evangelica* (preparation for the gospel),” he says: “Thus, whereas the Christian doctrine has often regarded Judaism as having outlived its usefulness and the Jews as candidates for conversion, the Jewish attitude enables us to

¹²² Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, in Frank Ephraim Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue* (New York: Ktav Publishing House), 1975, p. 358.

¹²³ Joseph Sarachek, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York: Hermon Press, 1968), p. 137.

¹²⁴ Cf. Abraham Joshua Heschel, in F.E. Talmage, p. 358.

¹²⁵ Heschel, p. 344.

¹²⁶ Heschel, p. 345.

acknowledge the presence of a divine plan in the role of Christianity within the history of redemption.” Heschel sums up Maimonides’ view in the following words: “Christianity and Islam, far from being accidents of history or purely human phenomena, are regarded as part of God’s design for the redemption of all men.”¹²⁷

Maimonides, according to Jacob Katz, “conceived their (Christianity and Islam) historic task to be the dissemination of Jewish ideas in preparation for the Messianic era, when the monotheistic doctrine of Judaism would be universally accepted. But in their actual religious practices and tenets, he regarded them — Christianity even more than Islam — as contaminated with idolatrous elements.”¹²⁸

The Jewish religious authorities in the Middle Ages accepted the Talmud’s words: “Pious men of all the nations have a share in the life to come.” All those who observe the so-called Noachide Laws fall under the category *hasidei ummot ha-olam*.¹²⁹ Katz has this comment on Rashi (1040-1105):

Since for the Talmud and midrashic literature Christianity was reckoned but one of the many heretical sects to be combated, Rashi followed their lead and did not make explicit reference to it. Christianity was included in the notion of *ummot ha-olam* the ‘Nations of the World,’ i.e. the gentile ... The other nations, Christians not excluded, were *ovdei avodah zarah*, that is adherents of “alien worship“ or idolaters.¹³⁰

Rosenzweig went further than Maimonides, holding that the Church and Christianity possess the truth for non-Jews and that these can only reach the Father through Jesus Christ. Rosenzweig speaks differently than Maimonides about the Church, but it is more difficult to get a grasp of Rosenzweig than of Maimonides simply because — to put it bluntly — Rosenzweig says so many things. In a theological and historical perspective, Maimonides seems to be a lot more consistent than Rosenzweig. In any circumstances it makes a great difference whether Christianity is regarded as a *preparatio messianica* where Jesus, if it is true, is seen as a false prophet for both Jews and non-Jews but whose message has nevertheless had positive consequences, and then on the other side, as Rosenzweig does, to regard Jesus as a totally unnecessary person for Jews but as absolutely necessary for non-Jews to reach the Father. But if, instead, one chooses to emphasize that Rosenzweig, with a reference to Yehuda Halevi, also says that “Christianity as a universal power is Jewish dogma,”¹³¹ then it is possible in this to see an approximation to Maimonides’ main view.

A clear answer to the question of whether the Christian Church’s message of Jesus is to be regarded as a *preparatio messianica* is essential in order to understand what Jews think of Christianity. Two examples will be offered in an attempt to demonstrate that, namely Pinchas Lapide and Samuel Levine.

¹²⁷ Heschel, p. 356-358.

¹²⁸ Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Schocken Books 1962), pp. 119-120.

¹²⁹ Mitch Glaser, p. 50.

¹³⁰ Katz, p. 24.

¹³¹ Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 346.

Pinchas Lapidé follows in Rosenzweig's footsteps.¹³² He sees "that the coming-to-believe of Christendom was without doubt a God-willed messianic act, a messianic event on the way to the conversion of the world to the One God."¹³³ Also to Lapidé Judaism and Christianity are two ways that lead to the Father. Therefore Jews are not to be converted to Christianity, which would be "to sprinkle sugar on the top of honey."¹³⁴

In his book *The Resurrection of Jesus* Lapidé reaches the conclusion, which is certainly a daring one for a Jew, that the resurrection of Jesus is a historic event. He says: "The experience of the resurrection as the foundation act of the church which has carried the faith in the God of Israel into the whole Western world must belong to God's plan of salvation."¹³⁵

But it calls for objection when Lapidé in the quotation above from Maimonides (*Hilkhot Melakhim* XI,4) finds "confirmation for this supposition from a high rabbinic authority," i.e. Maimonides.¹³⁶ Lapidé is not right when he argues that all these matters that refer to Jesus, for Maimonides, also "have to include his [Jesus'] resurrection," *the way Lapidé understands it*. He recognizes the Christian resurrection *belief* and its effects, which is something different from what Lapidé supposes.

In the "Epilog" Lapidé is not so ambiguous. In spite of everything, Jesus only belongs to the *preparatio messianica* of the full salvation which is still in the future. But this does not mean that his resurrection makes him the Messiah of Israel for the Jewish people. Lapidé refers to Clemens Thoma, a Catholic theologian, who admits that

for Jewish scholars, the testimony of the resurrection was no proof for the messiahship of Jesus because for them the concept of resurrection is not connected with the messianic expectations of salvation.... Through the resurrection of Jesus, an access to faith in the *one*, until then unknown, God of Israel was opened to the Gentiles.¹³⁷

Lapidé concludes: "I therefore can accept neither the messiahship of Jesus for the people of Israel nor the Pauline interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus."¹³⁸

Again, one cannot help questioning his line of reasoning. Following his argument, it might with some justice be said that since Judaism does not include the idea that there will be a risen Jewish Messiah for non-Jews, this whole construction must collapse.

But exactly the fact that Lapidé's approach to his subject of the resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament is *historical*, makes his leap away from the historic testimony of the significance of the resurrection for Jews all the more dramatic and all the more incomprehensible than the leap made by Rosenzweig, the philosopher. Theologically speaking, Lapidé has placed himself in a hopeless situation when, with the New Testament as basis, he recognizes the historical facticity of

¹³² See Carl E. Braaten, "Introduction: The Resurrection in Jewish-Christian Dialogue", in Pinchas Lapidé, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1984), pp. 16-18.

¹³³ Pinchas Lapidé & Jürgen Moltmann, *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 71.

¹³⁴ Lapidé & Jürgen Moltmann, p. 70.

¹³⁵ Lapidé, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 142.

¹³⁶ Lapidé, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 142.

¹³⁷ Clemens Thoma, *Kirche aus Juden und Heiden* (Wien: 1970), p. 45.

¹³⁸ Pinchas Lapidé, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 153.

Jesus' resurrection and at the same time, in spite of the New Testament, denies the importance of this event for Jews.

In the light of such observations it may be argued that Maimonides is clearer than Lapide and some Christian theologians who are eager to create harmony.

The academic dialogue between Jews and Christians today, where words and terms are usually subdued if not always clear, is one thing. Another is the confrontation where Jews warn against Christian mission among Jews and try to remedy the damages they think Christian mission inflicts on Jews.

"How to Refute Christian Missionaries" is the subtitle of Samuel Levine's book, *You Take Jesus, I'll Take God* — a title which in modern language expresses a point in two-covenant theology, namely that Jesus is only for pagans. As Levine says in his introduction, his book is "a response to Christian missionaries who are trying to convert the Jews." And he continues:

I have no quarrel with Christian missionaries who try to convert pagans into becoming Christians. That is highly meritorious, because they are then transforming an immoral, primitive person into a more moral and spiritual one. However, this is not true when a Jew becomes a Christian.¹³⁹

Apart from the fact that some people would consider Levine's choice of words about "the pagans" of our day offensive, it is nevertheless worth noting that Christian mission *among non-Jews* is said to be "highly meritorious." However, this does not prevent Levine from arguing that "the New Testament itself clearly indicates that Jesus and Paul were not the lovely people that they are claimed to be. They were vindictive, hate-breeding liars, rather than Messianic producers of peace, gentleness, unity and brotherhood among men."¹⁴⁰

Levine sums up: "Let us conclude this investigation of Christianity with the realization that it is easy for millions of humans to believe in nonsense."¹⁴¹

In other words: nonsense and hate-breeding liars are good enough for "pagans"!

Jewish and Christian academics who advocate two-covenant theology will doubtless prefer not to be lumped with Samuel Levine. But there is no denying that his words help us to focus attention on what is theologically relevant for our understanding of Christianity as a *preparatio messianica* for King Messiah. We can therefore conclude the following:

When Christianity is understood solely as a *preparatio messianica*, it makes sense theologically to argue that Jesus was neither the Messiah for Jews nor for non-Jews, even if he is meaningful for the latter. Whether or not the picture of Jesus is a sympathetic or a less sympathetic one, it remains a fact that the work of Jesus has been reduced compared to the New Testament picture.

When Christianity is understood as more than a *preparatio messianica*, as a special covenant but only for non-Jews, it is close to being historical and theological nonsense to want to find a basis for this in the New Testament. Nor is there basis for such a view in Maimonides.

Whether Jesus is the Church's *Christ* — who according to Rosenzweig leads non-Jews to the Father; or he is a "nasty and deceitful"¹⁴² *Jesus*, who according to Levine is good enough for

¹³⁹ Samuel Levine, *You Take Jesus, I'll Take God* (Los Angeles: Hamoroh Press, 1980), p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Levine, p. 91.

¹⁴¹ Levine, p. 131.

¹⁴² Levine, p. 92.

non-Jews; or he is a false prophet, who according to Maimonides serves to clear the way for King Messiah — these views are agreed about one basic point: Jews do not need *Jesus Christ* as Messiah and Lord.

As it seems to me that spokesmen for two-covenant theology often treat New Testament passages lightly and strain the meaning of them, we shall now deal with this issue.

Historical and Exegetical Absurdities

It is impossible to prevent people from re-interpreting historical texts against their original intention. If the re-interpretation, however, is in obvious conflict with the original content, an admission of this would be welcomed — and would increase the degree of seriousness. When philosophers and theologians make the leap away from the obvious historical meaning of a text, they must be prepared to meet with criticism — whether they are Jews or Christians.

A few examples will be given of frivolous play with New Testament words.

1. John 14:6

Frank Ephraim Talmage argues that “Rosenzweig tried to abandon the apologetic approach and establish a corelationship with Christianity which would affirm the necessity of each.”¹⁴³ However, Rosenzweig’s use of John 14:6 shows that in his approach he has not completely abandoned a *way* of thinking and arguing which has parallels in traditional polemics — Jewish as well as Christian.

It can hardly be denied that Rosenzweig uses the words from the Gospel of John contrary to their original meaning. Jesus’ words, “No one comes to the Father, but by me,” were addressed *to* Jews. So when Rosenzweig, unambiguously, takes the words to refer to non-Jews, it is a historical and exegetical absurdity. And only if Rosenzweig’s use of these words is seen in the light of an apologetic context, may it be argued that it bears the hallmark of “near-genius,” as Shemaryahu Talmon characterizes it.¹⁴⁴ Talmon quite rightly asserts, however, that Rosenzweig is contradicted by the first half of the verse: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” since the point of this verse is that eternal life can be received through faith in Jesus. According to the Gospel of John this verse speaks of the redemption which Rosenzweig claims belongs to Judaism.¹⁴⁵

2. Luke 15:31

In the Rosenzweig quotation at the head of this essay there is an allusion to the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable the father says to the elder son, who does not want to take part in the party for the younger son who had come home: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”

Rosenzweig and others use the quotation to say that Jews do not need Jesus in order to reach

¹⁴³ Talmage, p. 110.

¹⁴⁴ Shemaryahu Talmon, “Das Verhältnis von Judentum und Christentum in Verständnis Franz Rosenzweigs”, in R. Schaeffer & Bernhard Kasper & Shemaryahu Talmon Amir, *Offenbarung im Denken Franz Rosenzweigs* (Essen: Ludgerus, 1979), p. 135.

¹⁴⁵ Talmon, p. 136.

the Father; they are already with the Father.

In the light of what has been said above, we shall confine ourselves to the following observation: The parable may be identified as an apologetic parable, “in which Jesus justifies his table companionship with sinners against his critics,” as Joachim Jeremias says.¹⁴⁶ In the Lukan context Jesus’ critics are the Pharisees and the scribes (Luke 15:2). And the sinners and tax collectors are — like the Pharisees and the scribes — *Jews*. On the basis of just this one observation it is absurd to use Luke 15:31 as an argument for the opinion that Jews, without accepting Jesus’ teaching, are with the Father.

The parable has a double climax: it describes not only the return of the younger son, but also the protest of the elder brother.¹⁴⁷ While the point is to defend that the gospel is for sinners — Jewish sinners — the second is an invitation to some leaders — Jewish leaders — to abandon their resistance to the gospel.

However, the double climax of the parable does not speak for but rather against a double covenant theology. Even if we pose that the younger son does not merely represent sinners and tax collectors in Jesus’ day but in an anticipatory way includes future generations of non-Jews who accept the gospel, we shall do violence to the parable by isolating one verse which will then contradict the information given in the immediate context and also the context of the totality of Jesus’ teaching.

Apart from that, modern research of the parables has challenged the allegorical interpretation of the parables of Jesus. For centuries this interpretation has been very popular, not least because it has made it possible for the reader to read his own subjective, profound ideas into single words. It is the main point — or as here — the two main points of the parable that require our attention.

The main issue is clear. Jesus, the narrator of the parable, is a Jew, and both those that he defends and those that he criticizes through the parable are Jews. The message Jesus brings is for both “big” and “small” sinners, and consequently also for the Jewish leaders. From an exegetical point of view it is therefore absurd when Luke 15:31 is used as an argument that Israel, interpreted as the elder son in the parable, belongs to the Father’s house and is on God’s way and in God’s will.¹⁴⁸

3. “To save those who are eagerly waiting for him”

Franz Rosenzweig’s statement that “whether Jesus is Messiah will be shown when the Messiah comes”¹⁴⁹ is sometimes transformed into the popular idea that the second coming of Jesus will be the first coming of the Messiah for the Jews. Even the esteemed scholar David Flusser can say: “I do not think many Jews would object if the messiah when he came again was the Jew Jesus.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 104.

¹⁴⁷ Jeremias, p. 103.

¹⁴⁸ See also A. Roy Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967) and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide. The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 254-255.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. David Berger, “Jewish-Christian Relations: A Jewish Perspective” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20:1, 1983, p. 9.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Clemens Thoma, *A Christian Theology of Judaism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 134; David

And yet, the whole idea is an absurd one — from a New Testament point of view and also from a traditional Jewish point of view. According to the New Testament it is the same Jesus that went into Heaven who will come again — from Heaven. According to the post-Maimonides Jewish way of thinking about the Messiah, he will be a man among men, who does *not* come from Heaven. The comparison obscures the important difference between the New Testament doctrine of Jesus' supernatural second coming from Heaven and the traditional Jewish expectation that the Messiah is a human being of this world.

4. The exegetical and historical difficulty admitted

Hans-Joachim Schoeps is an example of a spokesman for two-covenant theology that admits the existence of exegetical and historical difficulties in relation to the New Testament.

“The New Testament is glad tidings only for the nations of the world, and the latter bear witness to it in the polyphony of the Christian churches and communities centred in Christ,” Schoeps says. He poses the question “how far Christian dogmatics may be ready to grant the existence of an absolute revelation apart from its own, such as would except Israel from the sphere of its saving proclamation.” He formulates the difficulties without beating around the bush. The issue is complicated, among other things, by “the fact that Jesus' original sense of mission was directed towards His own people.” Schoeps' own answer to this is: “However, the continued existence of Israel almost 2,000 years *post Christum natum*, still undisturbed in its consciousness of being God's covenant people, is testimony that the old covenant has not been abrogated, that as the covenant of Israel it continues to exist along-side the wider human covenant of the Christian Church.” Schoeps describes the problems in a disarmingly honest way:

We stand in obvious opposition to the view of history outlined by Paul. But we have taken into account the possibility that Paul falsely interpreted the will of God, that his understanding of saving history was a subjective judgment and an objective error. Although his view became official church teaching, the question of revision of this might now be raised, one result of which would be to correct the church's judgment on Israel in such a way as would involve the abandonment of the church's mission to the Jews. For to speak of the blinding and hardening of the Jews was a mistake, which might even now be rectified.¹⁵¹

5. The exegetical and historical difficulty obscured

It seems to me that the exegetical and historical difficulty is obscured by Christian exegetes like Krister Stendahl, who tones down what Paul actually says in Romans 9-11. The importance of these chapters for Paul's view of Israel and for his theology as such cannot be exaggerated. This importance has not always been recognized in the history of the Church and of Christian theology. On the contrary, Krister Stendahl is one of those theologians who has emphasized this importance. And yet the exegetical basis of his argument seems weak.

In chapters 9-11 Stendahl sees an expression of “Paul's growing awareness that God envisages a co-existence between Jews and Christians, a co-existence that makes mission an

Flusser, “To What Extent Is Jesus a Question for the Jews?”, in *Concilium*, 1974, new series vol.5, no. 10, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), pp. 256-258.

inappropriate mode of witness.”¹⁵² Paul’s missionary urge to convert Israel is held in check.¹⁵³ Stendahl supports this main view with the following words:

For can it be pure coincidence that in Romans 9-11 the names of Jesus or Christ are not to be found after 10:17 (or even 10:9, depending on what manuscript we read)? And it is equally striking that the doxology by which he concludes this section of Romans (11:33-36) is the only one in Paul which is totally in “God language,” i.e. without any reference to Jesus or Christ. There are not many places in Paul’s epistles where you can find three or four pages without reference by name to Jesus or Christ. It so happens that it is in this part of Paul’s epistle to the Romans that he consciously (or if unconsciously, then it is the more interesting) drops the Christ language. There is a striking absence of overt Christology.¹⁵⁴

Stendahl’s thesis makes Paul contradict himself, which challenges the validity of his thesis. It also seems strange that Stendahl ignores Paul’s main concern in 10:1-17: that salvation is tied up with the confession of Jesus as Lord (v.9), that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (v. 12), and that the gospel needs to be preached to Jews if they are to believe (vv. 14-17). Add to this that according to Acts 28 Paul tried, during his prison time exactly in Rome, to convince the local Jewish leaders (Acts 28:17-31). There is no reason to question that this should be the historical reality at the end of Paul’s work.

There is no denying that in Romans 9-11 Paul struggled with essential theological issues which include the idea of the mystery of Israel. But according to Pauline understanding a theology of the mystery of Israel includes the proclamation of Jesus to Jews. Whatever is meant by “mysterious co-existence,” the proclamation of the gospel is included. In other words: Paul can only be salvaged with the help of bad exegesis.

Rosemary Ruether, for example, has seen this clearly. Even though I have strong reservations about her interpretation of Paul, she is right when saying this: “The ‘conversion of the Jews’, then, becomes in Paul the last event in the historical economy of salvation.”¹⁵⁵ To Ruether, contemporary ecumenists speak “out of good intention, but inaccurate exegesis,” when they use Romans 11 to defend the doctrine of the two covenants. Gregory Baum designates it as “wishful thinking” when Christian theologians attempt to derive a positive conclusion from Paul’s teaching in Romans 9-11.¹⁵⁶

Ruether and Baum understand what is Paul’s main concern, namely that Jews need to believe in Jesus in order to be saved. In this main concern they *interpret* Paul correctly, but they themselves turn *against* Paul and reject his ideas as non-valid for Christians today. In other words: The recognition of Judaism as the truth for Jews today involves, for these theologians, a rejection of the Apostle Paul’s words about the necessity to proclaim Christ to Jews.

A Reformulation of Christian Theology

¹⁵² Krister Stendahl, “In No Other Name”, in Arne Sovik, *Christian Witness and the Jewish People* (Geneve: LWF, 1976), p. 53.

¹⁵³ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (London: SCM Press, 1977) p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Stendahl, “In No Other Name”, pp. 52-53. Cf. also Pawlikowski, 1980, p. 17.

¹⁵⁵ Rosemary R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 106.

¹⁵⁶ Gregory Baum, “Introduction”, in Rosemary R. Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 6.

We shall now proceed to give a brief outline of that reformulation of Christology which advocates of two-covenant theology have found compelled to make. While Rosenzweig emphasized the importance of the *Church's Christ* for non-Jews, although with the modifications we have mentioned above, quite a few modern spokesmen for two-covenant theology have challenged the Church's Christ and his importance for non-Jews.

I am well aware that there are significant differences between the various versions of the double covenant theology. Many Christians find it difficult to realize what is at stake. The reason could be that an emotional mode of argument is often employed when a popular version of two-covenant theology is presented.

It is interesting to note that this reformulation takes place whether or not one argues for a single covenant theory or for a double covenant theory. John T. Pawlikowski offers a succinct characterization of the difference between the single and double covenant theories with the following words: "The first wishes to re-incorporate Christianity into the original Jewish covenant. The second acknowledges two covenants that are different but complementary."¹⁵⁷

1. Guilt and the Holocaust

It would be a gross simplification to maintain that the appearance of two-covenant theology is due to the Holocaust. Its roots are, as we have seen, in the time before the Holocaust. On the other hand, it is difficult to over-emphasize the impact of the Holocaust on the theory's growth and further development in *Christian* circles after World War II. Ridden with guilt, some Christians were forced to a rethinking which resulted in a theology of silence towards Jews.

We should not forget, however, that a radical reformulation of traditional biblical theology had been done by Christian theologians long before the Holocaust and independent of the ecumenical dialogue between Jews and Christians. It is relatively easy to trace radical views on traditional Christian theology in the rationalistic theology of the 19th century; they are also there in the so-called liberal theology around the beginning of the 20th century, and in the existentialist inspired interpretation of the New Testament.

Since hatred of the Jews has nothing to do with what Jesus taught or did and since persecution of the Jews was against what Jesus wanted, Moishe Rosen concludes: "So, persecution of the Jews, instead of becoming a reason to cease telling Jews the gospel of God's love in Christ, should have become an impetus to do that."¹⁵⁸

It therefore becomes a relevant question whether it is God's word and his imperatives to missionize among Jews which should be obeyed, or whether it is people's emotions and ideas of the Holocaust that should guide one's thinking. In double covenant thinking, so much significance seems to be attached to the Christian Church's cruel history that the authority of the Lord of the Church according to the New Testament seems to be disregarded.

2. Anti-Semitism and the Bible

Rosemary Ruether's book, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, has

¹⁵⁷ Pawlikowski, 1980, p. 35.

¹⁵⁸ Moishe Rosen, "Jewish evangelism: the touchstone of theology and missiology", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, October 1990, p. 384.

been particularly important for the development of a Christian two-covenant theology, because the alleged anti-Semitism in the New Testament has been the starting-point for some rethinking. A reformulation of the New Testament's Christology is only a logical consequence of Ruether's opinion that the New Testament's interpretation of Jesus' suffering and death is anti-Judaic and that "anti-Judaism is the left hand of Christology."¹⁵⁹ The problem is not solved by isolating a few Bible verses in the New Testament. The problem is "the basic structure of New Testament theology itself," as Alan Davies puts it.¹⁶⁰

Clark M. Williamson, who is among those who find anti-Judaism in the New Testament, expresses the consequence he has to draw like this: "When we find anti-Judaism in a text from the Gospels, we have the hermeneutical freedom to preach against the text in the name of Jesus the Jew."¹⁶¹

To Alice and Roy Eckardt, for example, the consequence is that an insistence on "the divine inspiration of all Scripture ... cannot escape a proclivity to antisemitism."¹⁶²

When alleged anti-Semitism in the New Testament results in the above-mentioned conclusions, a reformulation of the view of the Bible as God's word is a *fait accompli*.

3. The Messiahship of Jesus

Rosemary Ruether argues that from the standpoint of the faith of Israel itself, "there is no possibility of talking about the Messiah having come (much less of having come two thousand years ago, with all the evil history that has reigned from that time until this) when the reign of God has not come."¹⁶³ She maintains that "what Christianity has in Jesus is not the Messiah, but a Jew who hoped for the kingdom of God and who died in that hope."¹⁶⁴

Gregory Baum argues that "as long as the Church proclaims Jesus as the one mediator without whom there is no salvation, no theological space is left for other religions, and, in particular, no theological validity is left for Jewish religion." To Baum it means that "Jesus is the Christ *now* only in the sense that he anticipated the divine victory at the end."¹⁶⁵

Some time in the future, and not till then, will Jesus be Christ in the proper sense of the word.

Although some advocates of two-covenant theology — among them Baum — maintain that to non-Jews Jesus may be Christ, all agree that to Jews he was not the Messiah. The way Jesus is portrayed as Christ seems to indicate that the work of Christ is understood in a way that differs from the explicit teaching of the New Testament which is another example that it is not enough to

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Rosemary Ruether, "Anti-Semitism Is the Left Hand of Christology", in R. Heyer, *Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), pp. 1-9.

¹⁶⁰ Alan Davies, *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. xv; cf. David Berger, p. 19.

¹⁶¹ Clark M. Williamson, *Has God Rejected His People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), p. 172.

¹⁶² Cf. David Berger, p. 11.

¹⁶³ Rosemary Ruether, "An Invitation to Jewish-Christian Dialogue: In What Sense Can We Say That Jesus Was 'The Christ'?", in *The Ecumenist*, 10, 1972, p. 17; cf. John T. Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press 1982) p. 26.

¹⁶⁴ Rosemary Ruether, "Christian-Jewish Dialogue: New Interpretations", in *ADL Bulletin*, 30, 1973, p. 4; cf. Pawlikowski, 1982, p. 26.

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Gregory Baum, p. 5 and 19.

speak of Christ. The decisive question is: which Christ?

When the messiahship of Jesus is being denied and considered of no significance for the salvation of Jews, the New Testament's view of the work and significance of Jesus has been reformulated.

4. The resurrection of Jesus

To Roy Eckardt the Holocaust has had the consequence that the resurrection of Jesus must be removed from the Christian faith if the degradation of the Jewish faith is to cease. He says about Jesus:

That Jewish man from the Galilee sleeps now. He sleeps with the other Jewish dead, with all disconsolate and scattered ones of the murder camps, and with the unnumbered dead of the human and non-human family. But Jesus of Nazareth shall be raised. So too shall the small Hungarian children who were burned alive at Auschwitz.¹⁶⁶

Resurrection — however that may be — is conceived as a futuristic category.

When the resurrection of Jesus is denied, or reinterpreted in existentialist terms, the result is a reformulation of his resurrection, as the apostle says: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17).

5. Salvation

If Jesus is not the Messiah and did not rise from the dead, it is no wonder that the New Testament's concept of salvation needs to be reformulated. Among modern Christian double covenant advocates salvation is not understood as the reception of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' redemptive death. The Christ event means to the Christian what the Exodus event means to the Jew, Rosemary Ruether argues. This seems to be boiled down to a hope suspended between the present existence and that which it ought to be.¹⁶⁷

When the view of salvation does not include redemption in the blood of Jesus as its central point and the forgiveness of sin as a consequence of this, the New Testament's understanding of salvation has been reformulated.

6. Evangelism

From what has been said above it must be clear that a weak position on Jewish evangelism is a litmus test of who you think Jesus is and what is his work. With that in mind it is not surprising that evangelical Christians can criticize other evangelicals when the latter are weak on mission to Jews, or pass over the subject in silence, or restrict themselves to dialogue.¹⁶⁸

There are few in the evangelical camp who have attempted to formulate a theological version of two-covenant theology.¹⁶⁹ But this does not necessarily mean that they feel a clear obligation

¹⁶⁶ Roy Eckardt, "The Resurrection and the Holocaust", in *Israel Study Group*, New York City, 4 March 1978, p. 13; cf. John T. Pawlikowski, 1980, p. 40.

¹⁶⁷ See Pawlikowski, 1982, pp. 28-29.

¹⁶⁸ This criticism is voiced in circles attached to the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE).

¹⁶⁹ See Robert M. Price, "An Evangelical Version of the 'Double Covenant': New Possibilities for Jewish-

to missionize Jews. For some this is motivated by a conviction that Israel will only be saved in connection with the return of Jesus, which means that in relation to Israel there are matters with a higher priority than mission on the agenda. Such matters can be the preoccupation with the state of Israel as a fulfilment of Old Testament land promises, or eschatological speculations. When one considers the zeal shown by the very same evangelicals to bring the gospel to non-Jews, indeed to nominal Christians, one cannot help being astonished at their negligence of the obligation to bring the gospel to Jews. But even more astounding, there are evangelicals who say an emphatic no to mission among Jews.

An Evangelical Contradiction in Terms

John Hagee's book, *Should Christians Support Israel?*, is a clear example that also among so-called evangelicals there are extreme theological viewpoints. In the book the author is introduced as "senior pastor of Cornerstone Church, a non-denominational, evangelical church located in San Antonio, Texas."¹⁷⁰ It is reasonable to assume that the ideas put forward by Hagee are representative of other evangelical circles, and therefore it is relevant to mention them here.

The author has a deep love of Israel. Hagee calls his book "a declaration of War" against, among other things, the "heresy" that "The Old Covenant is Dead and replaced by the New Covenant."¹⁷¹ This is a fine "war" to wage. But his weapons, to remain in the picture, are highly questionable. Catchword follows catchword (e.g. "The only theology that God ever created was Judaism!"; "God the Father was the first Zionist").¹⁷² Uncritically and speculatively Hagee sees the fulfilment of Old Testament statements in events and persons of our day (Hagee mentions, for instance, about 40 well-known Jewish persons, among them Kirk Douglas, Barbara Streisand, Danny Kaye, Peter Falk, to say that "These people are living testimonies; 'in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'").¹⁷³ With such a use of the Bible, one fears the worst when it comes to more important matters.

One of Hagee's main points is: "The message of the gospel was *from* Israel, not *to* Israel."¹⁷⁴ The latter is just as wrong as the former is true. Historically speaking, this is a striking denial of facts.

Hagee's main viewpoint leads him to the assertion that Jesus did not at all want to be Messiah for the Jews, a rather rash assertion for an evangelical. "The Jews did not reject Jesus as Messiah, it was Jesus who rejected the Jewish desire for Him to be their Messiah."¹⁷⁵ It is true that there are divergent opinions among theologians and historians of whether Jesus regarded himself as Messiah or not. In the history of theology there has also been some discussion about how Jesus

Fundamentalist Dialogue", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20:1, 1983, pp. 33-42; a critique is given by Louis Golderg, pp. 23-24.

¹⁷⁰ John Hagee, *Should Christians Support Israel?* (San Antonio: Dominion Publishers, 1987), p. [174].

¹⁷¹ Hagee, p. 1.

¹⁷² Hagee, p. 136 and p. 165.

¹⁷³ Hagee, pp. 162-163.

¹⁷⁴ Hagee, p. 62.

¹⁷⁵ Hagee, p. 72.

and the primitive church understood his messiahship. But the scholar who denies that Jesus was — or understood himself as — the Messiah would never take it into his head to begin a book the way Hagee does: “If you do not believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God ... put this book down.”¹⁷⁶ With such an introduction he signals to his readers that he sees the Bible as the Word of God. And when that is the case, it is out of the question to do what a radical theologian might do: make a distinction between the so-called historical Jesus, who did not want to be Messiah, and the Christ proclaimed by the primitive Church. The teaching of the primitive Church, as we know it from the New Testament scriptures, is quite unambiguous that while the gospel came *from* Israel it is also *for* Israel.

There is no reason to go into details about Hagee’s views. He argues that “right now there are Jewish people on this earth who have a special relationship with God”¹⁷⁷ — implied: without faith in Jesus. The result of this is that Jews should not be evangelized. Under cover of loyalty to the Bible, Hagee actually rewrites the entire New Testament testimony of Jesus.

Jewish and Christian Exclusivity

“The test of tolerance is where men combat for truth but honor persons,”¹⁷⁸ Arthur A. Cohen maintains. I fully agree with this but I do not hesitate to admit that I have had difficulty in living up to this test of tolerance in this essay. Or to put it bluntly, it is easier to show respect for Jews who from their point of view reject Jesus as Messiah, who are pleased with Judaism and without hesitation designate it as *the* truth, than it is to show respect for Jewish and Christian advocates of two-covenant theology who, although they refer to the New Testament, reformulate its message and dare not speak about truth in order not to offend anyone.

In the New Testament message there is an exclusivity attached to Jesus the Jew. It is not possible to remove this exclusivity without at the same time violating the Christian message. Christians who feel committed to the New Testament message have a clear right to go on believing that Jesus is the Messiah for Jews as well as for non-Jews. And they have the same clear right to *repeat* the exclusivity which was expressed by one of the first Jesus-believing Jews, namely the Apostle Peter, who, facing the Jewish council in Jerusalem asserted that there is salvation in no other name under heaven but the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). For those who share this conviction it means a commitment to take the gospel back to the Jewish people.

This attitude cannot under any circumstances be described as un-Jewish. That Jesus is the Messiah is something gentiles have learned from Jews. That the God of Israel, when he reveals himself, means what he says is something gentiles have learned from Jews. That there is such a thing as truth — distinct from relativism — is something gentiles have learned from Jews. That the gospel is for Jews is not a gentile or a gentile-Christian invention, but a Jewish conviction delivered to us by the Jesus-believing Jews. That there is salvation only in the name of Jesus is something the first Jesus-believing Jews said to their fellow-Jews.

It is possible to find the opinion that Christians who believe Christianity to be the truth in relation to Judaism are guilty of a “kind of religious arrogance that must be labelled *a sin*, in

¹⁷⁶ Hagee, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ Hagee, p. 125.

¹⁷⁸ Cohen, p. 216.

Daniel F. Polish's words.¹⁷⁹ In connection with this it may be remarked that the "sin" that God can only be known through Jesus is also something gentiles have learned from Jews.

When one reads the literature of two-covenant theology and related subjects and comes across statements like the one above, one cannot help being astonished that repeating what the first Jewish believers said is labelled anti-Semitism.

There are many bad things to be said about Christian theology's treatment of the relationship between Jews and Christians. More bad things can be said about the way the Christian Church has treated Jewish people over the centuries.

But one thing that cannot be said is that it is "un-Jewish" to tell Jews about the Jew Jesus.

But this lie has been repeated so often that some have come to believe it.

"The test of tolerance is where men combat for truth but honor persons," Cohen says. Among quite a few Jews and many advocates of two-covenant theology it is quite difficult to find this tolerance towards the Jesus-believing Jews of our time.

The Messianic Jews have, by and large, been made losers by two-covenant theology. The contempt they often meet is comparable to the contempt which the Christian Church has often shown Jews and their Jewish faith. It is not proper, however, for Christians to reject Jews who believe in Jesus for the sake of good relations with other Jewish people who do not accept Jesus.¹⁸⁰

Axel Torm, former chairman of the Danish Israel Mission sums up the problem with these words:

In earlier times the church downgraded Judaism in order to exalt Christ. It was a sin that the church committed. Today people downgrade Christ in order to exalt Judaism. Is that better?¹⁸¹

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¹⁷⁹ Daniel F. Polish, "A Jewish Perspective: This Moment in Jewish-Christian Relations," in *Ecumenical Bulletin* 44, 1980, pp. 8-9; cf. Berger, p. 15.

¹⁸⁰ See Daniel C. Juster, "Discrediting Jewish Evangelism" in *Mishkan* nos. 6&7, I+II/1987, p. 117.

¹⁸¹ Axel Torm, "Kirke og synagoge" [Church and Synagoge], in Magne Saeboe, *Israel, Kirken og Verden [Israel, the Church and the World]* (Oslo: Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1972), p. 188.