

**SUPERCESSIONISM AND ENGRAFTMENT :**  
**A Theological understanding of the**  
**Relationship between Church and Synagogue**

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	i-ii
INTRODUCTION :	
I        A CRISIS IN THE CHURCH'S THEOLOGY TOWARDS THE SYNAGOGUE	i-x
II       METHODOLOGY	x-xiii
 <b>PART 1 - THE PROBLEM</b>	
 CHAPTER 1 : THE THEOLOGY OF SUPERCESSIONISM	
I        A DESCRIPTION	1-6
II       SUPERCESSIONISM IN CHURCH DOGMA	
A    THE DISPERSION OF THE JEWS	6-8
B    THE CRIME OF DEICIDE	8-9
C    THE DEGENERATE STATE OF THE JEWISH RELIGION	9-11
III      SUPERCESSIONISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT	11-12
A    THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW	12-14
B    THE GOSPEL OF JOHN	14-16
C    THE TEACHING OF PAUL	16-19
 CHAPTER 2 : THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE THEOLOGY OF SUPERCESSIONISM	
I        INTRODUCTION	20-24
II       A HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN CHRISTIAN EUROPE	24-42

**PART II : THE ANSWER**

**CHAPTER 3 : A CRITIQUE OF THE THEOLOGY  
OF SUPERCESSIONISM**

I	INTRODUCTION	43-46
II	THE GOSPELS	
	A MATTHEW	47-51
	B JOHN	51-57

**CHAPTER 4 : THE TEACHING OF PAUL**

I	INTRODUCTION	58-67
II	HAS THE LAW BEEN SUPERSEDED BY CHRIST?	
	A ROMANS 2-3	67-72
	B ROMANS 4	72-74
	C ROMANS 7	74-77
	D ROMANS 9-11	77-87
III	CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS	88-92

BIBLIOGRAPHY	1-10
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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between the church and the synagogue has always been complex. Both as religions and as traditions, Christianity and Judaism are related to each other in ways that make it difficult for them to be merely parallel phenomena. On the one hand, Christianity grew out of Judaism with a claim to the fulfilment thereof, and, on the other hand, in the history of ideas they are intertwined beyond disentanglement. Besides the simple fact that Jesus lived and died as a pious Jew, the church and the synagogue share a common scripture and use common language about God.

During its history the church has not always known how to understand this close relationship with the synagogue. For the most part it tried to destroy the relationship, theologically and even at times physically. This attitude of theological anti-Judaism is called supercessionism.

It understands the church as superior to the synagogue since the church is the heir of the promises of the Old Testament, especially as they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The question arose after the horror of Hitler's "Final Solution" whether the church's theological relationship with the synagogue expressed in supercessionism was connected in any way to racial anti-Semitism.

For some theologians there was absolutely no link, but for others clearly so. Seeing more than a simple link between secular and sacred anti-Judaism, these theologians went one step further by showing that anti-Judaism had a basis in the church's New Testament. Thus it was impossible to preach the gospel without at the same time attacking Judaism.

This paper attempts to show the connection between racial and theological anti-Judaism, by examining in some depth the church's teaching of supercessionism and showing how this teaching has contributed to racial anti-Semitism.

This connection is made in order to suggest the need for a new model of relationship between church and synagogue, a model called engraftment, an image that expresses the church's and the synagogue's interrelatedness and equality. But our model, instead of rejecting the New Testament scripture as anti-Jewish, seeks to reinterpret it, especially the teaching of Paul, in order to use it as a basis for renewal.

## INTRODUCTION

### I. A CRISIS IN THE CHURCH'S THEOLOGY TOWARD THE SYNAGOGUE

The relationship between the church and the synagogue has for the most part been hostile. What the church tradition has taught concerning the validity of the synagogue is unmistakably negative. The religion of Israel is now superseded, the *Torah* abrogated, the promises fulfilled in the Christian church. Statements like "A convinced Christian is by his very nature a practising anti-Semite"<sup>1</sup> and "If it is Christian to hate the Jews, then we are all good Christians"<sup>2</sup> were fairly typical and indicative of this theological attitude in the church. This attitude did not stir the consciences of Christian theologians until fairly recently.

The advent of Nazi racial anti-Semitism produced in some church circles an uneasiness and prompted a new look at the church's past. Was rejection of Judaism implicit in Christianity in any way connected with racial anti-Semitism prevalent in Western society? In the 1948 publication of his book *Jesus and Israel*,<sup>3</sup> Jules Isaac showed how closely the contempt for Judaism was linked to Christian preaching from the New Testament onwards. This raised the questions: was the long tradition of Christian anti-Judaism a necessary condition for the Holocaust and could the church preach the gospel without at the same time denigrating Judaism?

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SEE FULL DETAILS IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

<sup>1</sup> Father Hippolyte Gayraud : Heer, F - God's First Love; p. 157

<sup>2</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam : Williamson, C - Has God rejected His People; p. 89

<sup>3</sup> Holt; Rinehart & Winston; New York; 1971 - English Translation

Thus under the impact of the Holocaust some Christian theologians like James Parkes and Paul van Buren sought to develop an alternative model of relationship between church and synagogue. The Christian response to the Holocaust seems to have taken place in two phases, which while overlapping considerably, can nevertheless be spoken of as casually related. Efforts by Christian theologians to come to terms with the Holocaust have led some to the recognition that a demonic strand of anti-Judaism runs all the way back to the first centuries of the Christian tradition. This recognition has led, in turn, to a radical hermeneutical shift in the way that Christian theologians interpret their own tradition as well as Judaism's, which in turn, has led to an altered understanding of present day Judaism and Christianity.<sup>4</sup> These theologians were willing to face the possibility that anti-Jewish trends in Christianity were not peripheral, but woven into the very core of the message. For as long as the Christian church regards itself as the successor of Israel as the new people of God substituted in the place of the old, and as long as the church proclaims Jesus Christ as the one and only mediator - without whom there is no salvation - there can be no theological validity left for the Jewish religion.

From its beginnings into the twentieth century, Christian theology not bothering to distinguish between Judaism and the Jews put both together in the category of things that ought not to exist. The Jews and their faithfulness to the *Torah* represented a monumental failure on the part of God's former people to accept God's new revelation in Christ. They had therefore forfeited their inheritance which had passed to the church, and they remained a negative witness to the consequences of human disobedience. For the sake of this negative and involuntary witness, the Jews were not to be killed, but neither were they to be allowed a

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<sup>4</sup> Earley, G - The Radical Hermeneutical Shift in post-Holocaust Christian Thought: p. 17



normal place in Christian society. As soon as the church gained an effective upper hand over the empire, the Jews lost their citizenship and were increasingly denied civil rights. The only good Jew was a converted Jew and even then still under suspicion. Only after the church lost its hold on political power did the Jews begin to regain normal political and human rights. But even an increasingly secularised so called Christian West still thought that an emancipated Jew should be baptized or should at least stop practising his or her Jewishness. As religious toleration spread, Christians relaxed their hostility to the Jews, but their theology did not change. The Jews were still those who rejected Christ, were responsible for his death, and consequently carried a divine curse upon them in their wandering, homeless existence until the end of time, unless they gave up being Jews and became Christians. This is as generously as it can be put, for no mention has been made yet of the massacres of Jews by Christians, of which there were many. In the light of this history, it is easy enough to understand how a contemporary Jewish thinker could say "The only thing that we Jews want from Christians is that you keep your hands off of us and our children".<sup>5</sup> We will prove these statements in the main body of our study, by an in-depth look at the history of the Jews in Christian Europe.

Considering the longevity and constancy of this teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism, the signs of change over the last thirty years are profound. Beginning with the watershed Second Vatican Council, and especially since 1968, ecclesiastical bodies, councils of bishops, and national church synods, Catholic and Protestant, have begun speaking up on the subject with increasing clarity and penetration, in such a way as to contradict this long held teaching of anti-Judaism.

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<sup>5</sup> Van Buren, P - Judaism in Christian Theology: p. 115

In 1965 the Second Vatican Council made the decisive declaration on the "Relationship of the Church to the Non-Christian Religions". In section 4 of this declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the Council declared unmistakably: "Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion".<sup>6</sup> At the same time in this document the church reflected on the statements by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 - 11. The document states that one may not conclude from the fact that the church is the new people of God that the Jews are "rejected or accursed by God".<sup>7</sup> This new attitude had been expressed earlier by the Tenth Evangelical Church Congress meeting in Berlin in 1961.

God entered into an eternal covenant with Israel. This was not annulled by the Crucifixion but - as the prophets promised - extended to include the heathens. The fact that the Jews and Christians have a different apprehension of God and the world is not a violation of the covenant. God has chosen both for salvation and makes history with both.<sup>8</sup>

This new attitude did not merely exist on a theological level but expressed itself in pragmatic changes. In 1970 for example the Council of Bishops of the Dutch Catholic Church declared null and void a canon which they had passed as recently as 1924 urging Christians to have nothing to do with Jews. They urged joint Bible study with Jews and spoke of God's covenant with Jews for all time.<sup>9</sup> This new attitude of the church towards Jews was put most succinctly by the Protestant theologian Helmut Gollwitzer:

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<sup>6</sup> The Documents of Vatican II; p. 666

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Heer, F - God's First Love; p. 417

<sup>9</sup> van Buren, P - Judaism in Christian Theology; p.15

If anyone has been a community of the cross during these centuries, it is the Jews, who were so often struck down by the community of the crucified, and who have, in a unique way, more than the victorious church, become the cross-bearers of history. The cross of God's election lies upon them; we have adorned ourselves with the cross long enough, without bearing it.<sup>10</sup>

More recently in 1987 the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. put forward a working paper entitled: *A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews*.<sup>11</sup>

This document proposed a new understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. The *Presbyterian Paper* emerged from the experiences of members of that denomination in Jewish-Christian dialogue. It states:

In the course of addressing this subject, our church has come to see many things in a new light. This study has helped us to feel the pain of our Jewish neighbours who remember that the Holocaust was carried out in the heart of 'Christian Europe' by persons many of whom were baptized Christians.<sup>12</sup>

The fifth affirmation of the paper is especially strong in penitence. It affirms:

We acknowledge in repentance the church's long and deep complicity in the proliferation of anti-Jewish attitudes and actions through its 'teaching of contempt' for the Jews. Such a teaching we now repudiate .....<sup>13</sup>

The *Presbyterian Paper* continues:

In subsequent centuries, after the occasions for the original hostility had long since passed, the church misused portions of the New Testament as proof texts to justify a heightened animosity toward Jews. For many centuries, it was the church's teaching to label Jews as 'Christ-killers'. This is known as the 'teaching of contempt'. Persecution of Jews was at times officially sanctioned and at other times encouraged or at least tolerated.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lapide, P & Luz, V - *Jesus in Two Perspectives*; p. 13

<sup>11</sup> Subtitled : A Paper Commended to the Church for Study and Reflection

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; p. 3

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Then, in its central paragraph, the paper addresses the present and makes its most ringing statements:

To this day, the church's worship, preaching and teaching often lend themselves, at times unwittingly, to a perpetuation of the 'teaching of contempt'. For example, the public reading of scripture without explicating potentially misleading passages about 'the Jews', preaching which uses Judaism as a negative example in order to commend Christianity, public prayer which assumes that only prayers of Christians are pleasing to God, teaching in the church school which reiterates stereotypes and non-historical ideas about the Pharisees and Jewish leadership - all of these contribute, however subtly, to a continuation of the church's 'teaching of contempt'.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in place of the traditional idea that Christians have superseded Jews in their covenant with God, the *Presbyterian Paper* proposed a concept of engraftment, according to which Christians are incorporated into God's covenant with Israel without the Jews thereby being rejected. This understanding was based on the Pauline analogy of the wild olive shoot (ie the Gentiles) being grafted into the old olive root (ie Israel) in Romans 11:17-24. Thus, the fourth affirmation of the document declares "When speaking with Jews about matters of faith, we must acknowledge that Jews are already in a covenantal relationship with God."<sup>16</sup>

Despite the sincerity and goodwill of the authors of these various documents towards Jews, there still appears to be a fundamental tension between the positive affirmation of the Jewish people and the church's continued insistence on the reason for its very existence - that its message of Jesus Christ alone bears witness to God in the world. The attempt to solve the problem of anti-Judaism in Christian theology by simply contradicting it, serves only to underline the problem. What is needed is not an alternative to the preaching of the church,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid; p. 10

but rather a radical hermeneutical shift in its basic message, a few marginal correctives will not do. The church must examine the very centre of its proclamation and reinterpret the meaning of the gospel for our time. It must examine those trends in the church's preaching that legitimate Christian power over others and have destructive effects on Jews. Christian theologians are able to do this if they hold that the authentic handing on of the Christian message in history does not consist in simple repetition of previous teaching, but is a creative process in which Christian teaching, in obedience to God's Word in the present, is reinterpreted and reconstructed as gospel for this era.<sup>17</sup>

The challenge is to rethink the church's self-understanding in an original way so as to make room for Judaism. Yet is such a radical reinterpretation of the gospel possible? Is it possible to purify the Christian message of its anti-Jewish ideology without invalidating Christian claims altogether? This is the frightening question posed by an attempt to genuinely recognise and affirm Judaism in its own right and on its own terms, yet it might be the moral prerequisite for any Christian theology after Auschwitz.

If the advent of the Holocaust caused a crisis in the church's theology towards Jews, then the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 severely compounded it. For nineteen hundred years the church's traditional theology had taught that the Jews were a wandering, suffering, despised people, and thus dogmatically denied the very possibility of such a return to the land since eternal exile was the historical expression of Jewish reprobation. As the church Father Justin Martyr gloated "You Jews suffer, your country is a wasteland, Jerusalem lies destroyed, for you have killed the Saviour!"<sup>18</sup> The third-century African Father Cyprian, in

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<sup>17</sup> Reuther, R R - Faith & Fratricide; p. 8

<sup>18</sup> Dialogue with Trypho the Jew - Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol 1; p. 202

his writing, *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews* taught that the Jews had lost Jerusalem and the promised land because they had fallen under divine wrath for their disbelief, thus the Christian idea of the wandering Jew developed. In the words of the fourth-century poet, Prudentius:

From place to place the homeless Jew wanders in ever-shifting exile, since the time when he was torn from the abode of his fathers and has been suffering the penalty for murder and having stained his hands with the blood of Christ, whom he denied, paying the price of sin .... This noble race [is] ... scattered and enslaved .... It is in captivity under the younger faith ... a race that was formerly unfaithful confesses Christ and triumphs.<sup>19</sup>

It was in the creation of the State of Israel that Christian theological anti-Judaism of this type came to an end. Here the dispersion was overcome and the Jewish people regathered into the ancient homeland, contrary to that Christian theory that denied this possibility. The creation of the Jewish state confronted the Christian doctrine of eternal misery and dispersion for the Jewish people to the end of time. The Christian myth had spectacularly failed, made obsolete by history.

Thus the shock of these major historical events in Jewish history - the Holocaust and the state of Israel - led some Christians to a change of heart. As Karl Rahner writes:

Christians have always perpetrated the gravest, most appalling atrocities against the Jews. We must face up to this charge; we must allow the plaintiffs who tell us what Christians have done to the Jews free reign to speak.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Apotheosis; 541-50 - Reuther, R R - *Faith & Fratricide*; p. 134  
<sup>20</sup> Lapide, P & Luz, V - *Jesus in Two Perspectives*; p. 12

In terms of dialogue between Christians and Jews this meant that Christians had to take responsibility in humility and penitence for what the church had done in the past to Jews. Christians had to face the issue of theological anti-Judaism within their tradition. This had to be faced squarely, openly and honestly if Christians were to participate in good conscience in true dialogue with Jews. Another issue which arose in relation to dialogue after the Holocaust and the creation of Israel was the question of the continued legitimacy of the church's mission to the Jews. Was it, in the light of the Holocaust, correct for Christians to try to convert Jews? Rabbi Abraham Herschel writes that history, and especially the history of the Holocaust, shapes Jewish perception of Christian mission: "To the Jews such an attempt to 'convert him' appears as an attack on the very existence of Jews, a call to self-extinction".<sup>21</sup> Some segments of the church agreed with this sentiment.

In 1975 the American bishops of the Catholic Church, in their Statement on the Jews maintain "Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is, above all, respect for his faith and his religious convictions".<sup>22</sup> The prelates expressly disapproved of all efforts on the part of Catholics to convert Jews. The theology which stood behind this prohibition on the conversion of Jews by Christians was the idea that the church and synagogue represented the same biblical faith, even if created by distinct though inter-related covenants. Thus the Jewish covenant remains valid and there is a new covenant brought by Jesus which extends the ancient promises to the Gentiles but in no way replaces the old. Therefore Jews have access to grace through fidelity to the original covenant and Gentiles find faith in one God and deliverance from idolatry through faithful acceptance of the new covenant. Jews do not need Christianity to remain faithful to biblical promises but there are two ways within biblical

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<sup>21</sup> Da Silva, A - Is There a New Imbalance in Jewish-Christian Relation?; p. 113  
<sup>22</sup> Swidler, L - Catholic Statements on Jews : A Revolution in Progress; p. 300

faith, one for Jews, one for Gentiles, both ways remain in tension and are meant to test and encourage one another. This was the beginning of a new theology of the church toward the Jewish people, one that took into account how its witness to the gospel was perceived by Jews as an attempt to erode and ultimately destroy their communities.

Facing the possibility that there might be a destructive shadow side to the proclamation of the gospel is not easy for Christians to accept. Confronting the repressed side of one's own history causes pain and demands a great deal of rethinking. A sentence from Vatican Council II has application here :

Christ summons the church, as it goes its pilgrim way to that continual reformation of which it always has need, insofar as it is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in church discipline or even in the formulation of doctrine, these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment.<sup>23</sup>

## II. METHODOLOGY

This dissertation shall attempt, in the light of the above, the constructive task of outlining a Pauline foundation for a non-anti-Jewish theology. We shall attempt, as post-Holocaust theologians engaging in Christian-Jewish dialogue, to demolish the foundation of Christian anti-Judaism found in the church's theology. The way for the church to alter its theology *vis-à-vis* Judaism, is to shift radically its hermeneutic. The church must begin to read its scriptures historically, since it is unhistorical exegesis which has led to theological anti-Judaism. By historical exegesis we mean that the New Testament must be interpreted within

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<sup>23</sup> The Decree on Ecumenism; Chap II - The Documents of Vatican II, p. 350



the context of first-century Jewish history. It must be placed firmly within its historical, geographical, social and ideological context. Secondly, we mean that because of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, we must read our scriptures historically. Just as the authors of the New Testament took the destruction of the temple in 70 AD as a sign of the rejection of Israel by God, so must the church now read the signs of the times. In doing so, the church will see in the survival of the Jewish people "evidence" of God's continuing faithfulness to and affirmation of the covenant people, an affirmation which the church must follow if it is not to contradict the logic of its own past or deny God's will altogether. As Paul van Buren puts it:

All that is required (for the church to affirm the Jewish people) is that it open its eyes to the facts, take them seriously, and then do what the church has always done; reinterpret its tradition in the light of these facts, so as to take the present into past and its past up into the present.<sup>24</sup>

Such a reinterpretation will involve recognition of the full historicity of the New Testament, acknowledgement that the traditional exegesis of the New Testament has been unhistorical, and the understanding that the problem lies not with New Testament as such but rather with the tradition's unhistorical exegesis of it. As van Buren writes:

What needs to be corrected is not the Apostolic Writings [by this he means the New Testament] but the way in which we exegete them.... Again and again, we have failed to exegete these writings historically and the consequence of our failure has been terrible sufferings wrought upon God's people because of Christian anti-Judaism. We shall exegete these writings historically if and only if we do so with full awareness of the evil that has been brought into the world because of how they have been exegeted in the past.<sup>25</sup>

Thus in our exegesis we must follow a method which distinguishes carefully "between what a text meant according to the author's original intention, and what it came to mean and/or

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<sup>24</sup> van Buren, P; Affirmation of the Jewish People : A Condition of Theological Coherence; p. 1075  
<sup>25</sup> How Shall We Now Exegete the Apostolic Writings? p. 105, 110

might mean at a later point in history or the future".<sup>26</sup> Our main hermeneutical principle to be kept in mind when doing exegesis of the text of the New Testament is "never to ask 'what does it mean?' without adding ... 'to whom?'"<sup>27</sup> In other words, we must try to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of the text in order to establish the *mens auctoris*, this is, the original meaning of the text intended by the author.<sup>28</sup> This position is in accord with the hermeneutical theory worked out by E D Hirsch in *Validity in Interpretation*, which distinguishes between the meaning of a text, which is unchanging, and the significance of a text, which changes according to the interpreter. Hirsch writes:

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. Significance, on the other hand, names a relation between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed any imaginable.... Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means. Failure to understand this simple and essential distinction has been the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutic theory.<sup>29</sup>

According to Hirsch, the failure to observe this distinction leaves the interpreter with no normative criteria by which to judge the validity of multiple interpretations. When the distinction is made, however, the norm is the unchanging meaning of the text.

Two factors have enabled us to discern the need for a fresh look at the New Testament and especially Paul in relation to Judaism. First, the ever-increasing knowledge of the *Sitz im Leben* of the earliest communities from Jewish sect to Gentile church and, second, the urgent need to work out the relationship of the church to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. In fact, it is the latter - the similarity of the concerns in the church's present situation to the

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<sup>26</sup> Stendahl, K: *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*; p. 125

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Earley, G D; *The Radical Hermeneutical Shift in Post-Holocaust Christian Thought*; p. 22

<sup>29</sup> p. 8

concerns of Paul's situation - which enables us to cut through the sedimental layers of the church's unhistorical exegesis of the text to find the answer to our problem in the very terms in which Paul worked out the answer to his problem. We must remember, however, that Paul's situation, while similar in some respects to our own, is by no means identical with ours. But, before that can be done, we must examine the problem of theological anti-Judaism which is found in the church's teaching of supercessionism. We must try to establish a link clearly between the teaching of supercessionism and racial-anti-Semitism, for then we have grounds for such a radical shift in the church's understanding of itself in relation to the synagogue.

Thus the plan of the dissertation will be as follows. Part One will set out the problem of supercessionism and the fruit it has borne. Then, in Part Two, we shall attempt to answer the problem of theological anti-Judaism by giving a critique of supercessionism. In order to do this, we must submit certain Pauline books to a revisionist reading.

## PART 1

### THE PROBLEM

#### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE THEOLOGY OF SUPERCESSIONISM

##### I : A DESCRIPTION

Beginning from the second century, it has been supercessionist theology which has become the dominant way of understanding the relationship of church and synagogue. Yet it is difficult to place one's finger firmly on the teaching called supercessionism within the corpus of Christian theology, simply because this teaching is so closely interwoven with the overall content of the Christian message. Christianity has always defined itself *vis-à-vis* Judaism. For example, the proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah in whom all the divine promises have been fulfilled seems to leave no scope for a faith which finds that the presence of the Messiah is not credible in a world filled with evil and which therefore cannot agree with this proclamation. Consequently, it is not easy to proclaim Jesus Christ without at the same time employing a negation of the Jewish covenant. Thus, this teaching is not merely one theme in Christian theology, but is in a sense the heart of Christian self-definition. It is the model in which the Jewish covenant is negated and therefore the Christian message understood. It is a systematic pattern of thought, the way to proceed in articulating the Christian faith.

To make our case stronger, we must enlist the help of a discipline outside of theology. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*, make a powerful point within a sociological framework concerning the relationship of the church to the synagogue. They point out the indispensable role played by symbols within the life of any social institution, eg., the church. The mechanisms used to maintain and legitimize a symbolic universe include theology and exegesis. But, for all these efforts, such mechanisms never fully succeed in creating a symbolic universe which is beyond question. Specifically, the existence "of an alternative symbolic universe such as Judaism poses a threat because its very existence demonstrates empirically that one's universe is less than inevitable".<sup>1</sup> At such times, the institution will seek to maintain its legitimacy through the process of ideological nihilation, ie., the conceptual elimination of everything in opposition to its own universe. What needs legitimation "is not only the new reality, but ... the abandonment or repudiation of all alternative realities. The nihilating side of the conceptual machinery is particularly important in view of the dismantling problem that must be solved".<sup>2</sup>

In short, if we are dealing with a religious community like the church, whose view of its own legitimacy is fundamentally dependent on a set of symbols, eg., the Old Testament, which are simultaneously claimed by another religious community like the synagogue, and if, in addition, this other religious community is able to present arguments which appear to establish the priority of its claims, as well as being able to continually flourish, then, under these circumstances, the task of conceptual nihilation will become compelling. Or, as the

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SEE FULL DETAILS IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

<sup>1</sup> p. 108

<sup>2</sup> p. 159

psycho-analyst Rudolph Lowenstein puts it in *Christians and Jews: A Psycho-Analytical Study*, the negative image of Jews and Judaism within the Christian tradition are indicative of "The Christian reaction to their moral debt to the Jews. All reflect also Christianity's incomplete victory over Israel".<sup>3</sup> This is what Rosemary Reuther means in stating that "for Christianity, anti-Judaism was not merely a defense against attack, but an intrinsic need of Christian self-affirmation".<sup>4</sup>

Thus, within the church's theology of supercessionism, Judaism is portrayed as a model of barrenness, defiance and antiquarianism, emptily clinging to what is past and resisting the new. Judaism has come to represent both a religious system and a people who, because they defy their own election, that is, they do not convert to Christianity, repudiate God and are ultimately disclaimed by God. They commit a long history of crimes against the prophets sent by God and their rebelliousness eventuates in deicide - the killing of God. On the other hand, the same model holds that the church is both a religious system and a people of innovation who are universal rather than tribal, spiritual rather than carnal, obedient rather than defiant. This universal new people inherits all the promises given to the prophets, while all their denunciations are applied to the Jews. The ethics, worship and biblical interpretation of the church are spiritual and contravene Jewish ways of acting, praying and reading the scripture. The church's way of doing things is simply superior to the synagogue's way.

Consonant with this model are the two major themes of the *Adversus Judaeos* theology:

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<sup>3</sup> p. 199

<sup>4</sup> Faith and Fratricide, p. 181

(1) Rejection/election: The Jews are rejected and the Gentiles elected. Gentiles replace Jews in the economy of salvation. This motif dwells heavily on the elder brother/younger brother allegory and the charge of deicide.<sup>5</sup>

(2) Inferiority/fulfilment : Jewish Law is inferior, while the Christian gospel of grace in Christ is superior and fulfils biblical promises. Jewish exegesis of the scripture is blind and thus invalid, whilst Christians rightly interpret the Old Testament.

Furthermore, the entire meaning of the Old Testament depends upon and finds its fulfilment in the New.

The *Adversus Judaeos* theology is an apologetic argument in support of the claim that the church has superseded the synagogue. The word supersede comes from the Latin : One thing sits (*sedere*) upon (*super*) the place of another. The universal, spiritual, obedient church displaces the particularist, carnal, insubordinate synagogue. The new people pushes aside the old people. Jews are supplanted from participation in the covenant; Christians replace them.

Thus, the Catholic theologian Michael Schmaus can say, in his eight-volume *Dogma*, which is meant to be an authoritative presentation of Catholic teaching:

With the message of the New Covenant, the Old Covenant becomes obsolete. The Christian revelation on the other hand is eternally young. But, once it is here, those who prepared the way for it have lost any real meaning for their existence. Their tragedy, indeed their guilt, consists in the

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<sup>5</sup> Williamson, C M - Has God Rejected His People?: p.90

fact that they do not regard themselves as precursors and consequently are not prepared to be absorbed in the New when the New appears.<sup>6</sup>

He continues:

When however the new age dawned, which had been pre-formed and prepared in the Old Testament, it was not understood or accepted by the representatives of the Old Testament people of God. They rejected Jesus Christ. Consequently they could no longer be partners in God's covenant with men. By rejecting Christ, they abandoned their own history, the basis of their own existence as God's people. That is the reason why they themselves are rejected (Rom. 9:31-33; 10:2f.; 11:7-10)<sup>7</sup> .... the whole Old Testament heritage passes over to the church and above all in the fact that the completion of the church involves the conversion of the Old Testament people of God.<sup>8</sup>

Schmaus takes the rejection of the Jews one step further:

The Jews were bound to be upset by Christ, since he disturbed them in their worldly thoughts and actions.... Their uneasiness ... grew into hatred against him. They decided to eliminate this disturber who frightened them out of their human way of thinking, and they killed him.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore :

[The Jewish] politicians and theologians misunderstood the promises and handed over to death the one who was to have fulfilled them by the authority of the Father. After many unsuccessful attempts, the leaders managed to rouse the people's passions against him. Thus, the whole people came to share in the guilt of its leaders ... it deliberately took the blame on itself with all the consequences (Matt 27:25). In the execution of Christ the whole people set its seal on the rejection of God's envoy. It placed itself under the judgement which hangs above everyone who rejects Christ in unbelief (John 3:18f).... The judgement began with the fall of Jerusalem and continues throughout man's history. Under God's judgement the people cannot live

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<sup>6</sup> Vol 2#2; p. 105

<sup>7</sup> Vol 3#1; p. 79

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Vol 2#2; p. 124



and may not die ... the curse <sup>3</sup>will accompany this people throughout history and will call down one judgement after another on them....<sup>10</sup>

All the themes of supercessionism, rejection/election, fulfilment/inferiority are discernable in Schmaus' theology. Furthermore, these themes are underpinned by a further three assumptions : (A) The dispersion of the Jews; (B) is the direct result of their responsibility for the killing of Christ; (C) Judaism at the time of Jesus and Paul was a self-satisfied legalistic religion in a degenerate state. Schmaus does not stand alone in these assumptions; they have been consistently repeated by Christian theologians from earliest times.

## II : SUPERCESSIONISM IN CHURCH DOGMA

### (A) The Dispersion of the Jews

In AD 70 the Second Temple was destroyed by the Roman general Titus, who razed Jerusalem to the ground. These historical events were transcendentalised in Christian theology. The events of AD 70 were interpreted as God's judgment on Judaism for rejecting and crucifying Jesus. As Origen (185-254) says: "the whole Jewish nation was overthrown within one single generation after Jesus had undergone these sufferings at their hands. For ... after the date of the crucifixion of Jesus, did the destruction of Jerusalem take place". He continues:

One fact, then, which proves that Jesus was something divine and sacred, is this, that Jews should have suffered on His account now for a lengthened

time calamities of such severity. And we say with confidence that they will never be restored to their former condition.<sup>11</sup>

In his *Reply to Faustus*, Augustine (354-430) lays out his distinctive contribution to the idea of punishment for Judaism. He creates the idea of the wandering Jew, the people who, in their homelessness, constitute the witness of unbelief. He uses the Cain and Abel story (Gen 4:1-16) as an allegory of the Jews (Cain) and Christ (Abel). Cain and the Jews find their offering to God rejected, while the faith of Abel and the new covenant are preferred to the earthly observances of the Old. Augustine says :

Cain and the Jews offered well, but did not divide well, missing the coming of Christ. Thus, like Cain, they kill the innocent brother and they shall wander the earth. So, to the end of the seven days of time, the continued preservation of the Jews will be a proof to believing Christians of the subjection merited by those who ... put the Lord to death.<sup>12</sup>

This idea is not only found in the Western Church, but also in the East : "Covered with disgrace and rejected by all nations from the moment Christ was crucified, [the Jews] have been scattered far and wide, they have become the servants of all the peoples of the earth, because they did not believe in Christ".<sup>13</sup>

Neither has it died in more recent times :

Jesus had foretold it : the Jewish people was to be scattered. A few dozen years after the death of Jesus ... scattered to the four winds of the earth.... The Christian tradition has made no mistake about this. It regards ... the dispersion of Israel as a divine punishment : having rejected Christ in order to save their country, the Jews have been rejected from their land, and their

<sup>11</sup> *Against Celsus* IV:22; Ante-Nicene Fathers; Vol 4; p. 506

<sup>12</sup> Book XII; Nicene + Post-Nicene Fathers; #1 Vol 4; p. 187

<sup>13</sup> Isaac. J - *The Teaching of Contempt*; p. 45

persistent non-assimilation in the midst of other races remains the indelible proof of their providential punishment.<sup>14</sup>

## (B) The Crime of Deicide

In AD 165 a new term was coined: *Deicidium* - the killing of God by Melito of Sardis (c120-185) in a sermon, *On the Passover*: "Listen, all you *families of the nations*, and see! An unprecedented murder has occurred in the middle of Jerusalem ... the God has been murdered, the king of Israel has been put to death by an Israelite right hand".<sup>15</sup> The term was new, but the idea was old, being recorded in I Thessalonians 2:14-15: "The Jews ... killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets". Most of the early church fathers took up the same theme. Justin in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew says to his partner: "the highest pitch of your wickedness lies in this, that you hate the righteous One, and slew Him".<sup>16</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa (331-396) says something similar:

Slayers of the Lord, murderers of the prophets, adversaries of God, men who show contempt for the law, foes of grace, enemies of their father's faith, advocates of the Devil, brood of vipers, slanderers, scoffers, men whose minds are in darkness, leaven of the Pharisees, assembly of demons, sinners, wicked men, stoners and haters of righteousness.<sup>17</sup>

We find the charge of the Jews as "deicide" not only in the early centuries, but also in the twentieth century. In the summary at the end of his book *The Trial of Jesus*, Josef Blinzler claims that we would be bound today to come to the same conclusion as the early Christian

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<sup>14</sup> Father Fessard; 1936; Ibid: p. 46

<sup>15</sup> White, R C - Sermon "On the Passover"; trans; intro & commentary: p. 4

<sup>16</sup> Ante-Nicene Fathers; Vol I; p. 268

<sup>17</sup> Oratio in Christi Resurrectionem; Vol 15; p. 533; cited in Bratton, F G - The Crime of Christendom; p. 83

preachers about the historical Jewish responsibility: "The main responsibility rests on the Jewish side".<sup>18</sup>

Even the New Testament scholar Jeremias assumes Jewish guilt: "The disciples were spared at Jesus' arrest, in a remarkable way the Jewish authorities were satisfied with the killing of Jesus and left the disciples unmolested".<sup>19</sup>

### **(C) The Degenerate State of the Jewish Religion**

Judaism is depicted as an ossified religion, reduced to mere formalism and ritual and was at the time of Jesus and Paul no more than legalism without a soul. This contention has its source in the Judeo-Christian controversy over the Law of Moses and its observance. Christians assumed that Jewish observance of the Law had deteriorated to such an extent that the Law had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Thus Melito of Sardis can say "so also the law was finished when the gospel was revealed, and the people was abandoned when the church was established".<sup>20</sup> Thus, Augustine considered the Jews to be an "unbelieving, stubborn and blind people"<sup>21</sup> for not seeing this. For Pope Gregory the Great the Jews "have been faithful only to the letter of the divine commandments.... A people more dedicated to

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<sup>18</sup> p. 290

<sup>19</sup> New Testament Theology, Part 1; p. 285

<sup>20</sup> White, R C - Sermon "On the Passover"; trans, intro & Commentary; p. 29

<sup>21</sup> Lapide & Luz - Jesus in Two Perspectives; p. 58

the world than to the truth ... who had but a fleshly understanding of the Incarnation of God, and refused to see in Him anything but a man".<sup>22</sup>

The reformer Calvin assumes the same:

Matters had come to such a pass with these people, so great and so widespread were the abuses, so thoroughly had the high priests extinguished the pure light of doctrine through their negligence or malice, that there scarcely remained any respect for the Law.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, it is in our time that the assumption of a perverted Jewish faith has reached its full magnitude. An expert in New Testament studies, Joachim Jeremias, writes: "Why does Jesus reject the *Halakah*?" Mark 7:6-8 gives the answer. It is because this law-giving is entirely the work of men (v 7) and contradicts the commandment of God (v 8). It puts casuistry above love, as Jesus shows by means of the *gorban* casuistry of the Rabbis (7:9-13).<sup>24</sup> It is this type of piety which is the "cancer" of Judaism.<sup>25</sup> It means that sin is no longer seen as rebellion against God but is indemnified by good works. "Where sin is not taken seriously, men think too well of themselves. They become self-assured, self-righteous and loveless".<sup>26</sup> "This is the situation of those confronted with catastrophe: they are stubborn and indifferent, and the pious live in self-righteous blindness, which makes them deaf to the gospel".<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Bultmann is even more explicit in his sharp condemnation of Jewish legalistic piety: "The law as it confronts man in the form of the law of Moses is the way in which man comes to grief in sin. Christ is the end of the law".<sup>28</sup> In his *Theology of*

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<sup>22</sup> Isaac, J - The Teaching of Contempt; p. 76  
<sup>23</sup> Commentaries on the New Testament; #1; p. 155

<sup>24</sup> New Testament Theology; p. 210

<sup>25</sup> Ibid; p. 47

<sup>26</sup> Ibid; p. 48

<sup>27</sup> Ibid; p. 151

<sup>28</sup> Prophecy and Fulfilment - Westermann, C (ed) *Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*; p. 74

*the New Testament* he states : "Jesus' message is a great protest against Jewish legalism - i.e. against a form of piety which regards the will of God as expressed in the written Law and in the Tradition which interprets it, a piety which endeavours to win God's favour by the toil of minutely fulfilling the Law's stipulations".<sup>29</sup> In this way the "motivation to ethical conduct is vitiated".<sup>30</sup> Jewish submission is purely ceremonial, fulfilling the letter of the law, but not its real, moral demands. Thus, submission to the Law is corrupt at its very roots since its practice is an exercise in vanity. Thus, as a whole, "Judaism was no longer a cultic religion, but had become a religion of observance".<sup>31</sup> It follows then that if the Law is corrupt, then Christ fulfils it. As Walter Zimmerli writes: "Christ is at the same time the fulfilment of the Old Testament, in which it comes to its ultimate honour".<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, because the "Church and not the Synagogue is the true Israel, then the Church's interpretation of the Scriptures is the true one, as opposed to the exegesis of the Synagogue".<sup>33</sup>

### III : SUPERCESSIONISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Finally, in our description of supercessionist theology, we must characterize the way this theology has traditionally interpreted the New Testament. Naturally, this theology has drawn upon the New Testament as the source and basis of its teaching. It is also true to say that it is difficult to discern between the interpretation of the New Testament by

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<sup>29</sup> Vol 1; p. 11

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid; p. 17

<sup>32</sup> Promise & Fulfilment in Westermann, C (ed) *Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*; p. 104

<sup>33</sup> Paterson, E - cited in Klein, C - Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology; p. 58

supercessionist theology and the actual anti-Judaism of the New Testament itself, especially in the gospels, though this is not the case with Paul. We shall discuss this problem in greater detail in Part 2. Due to the constraints of length it is impossible to survey the whole New Testament. Thus we must focus attention on Matthew, John and the teaching of Paul.

### **(A) THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

Matthew was written, probably in the city of Antioch, in the decade after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD70. Christians had not yet been expelled from the synagogue and discussions between church and synagogue were still taking place. Because the temple had been destroyed, the centre of Jewish faith and practice could no longer be maintained. The worship of God by the offering of sacrifices had, of necessity, ceased. It is in this new situation that the church and the synagogue were each claiming to be the rightful heirs to the faith of the Jewish forefathers, which, since the temple had been destroyed, could no longer be practised.

Matthew was thus written in a time of increasing rivalry and strife between church and synagogue. He sets these two groups in opposing camps. The Christians believed that Jesus was the fulfilment of the scriptures; the Pharisees believed instead in piety and acts of loving-kindness. The only citation of Hos 6.6 in the New Testament occurs in Mt 9:13 and 12:7, in which Jesus quotes it against the Pharisees. Thus it is the Christians, not the Pharisees, who know what "mercy, and not sacrifice" means. The Pharisees are the opponents of Jesus. They seek to impose human traditions on him and on others (12:1-2, 9-

12, 15:1-2). Because Jesus opposes their teachings, they plot against him (12:14). They seek to trap Jesus by asking for a sign from him (16:1) or by embroiling him in controversial questions (19:3, 22:15-16, 22:34-36). The Pharisees are hypocrites who do not practise what they preach (23:3-4). Their prayers are said for public recognition and not from piety (23:5-7). They obey minor matters of the law but omit the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith (23:23). Thus, the Pharisees are not children of Abraham but "sons of hell" (23:15). As Hann says "There is clearly a claim of supercession behind Matthew's treatment of Pharisees. Matthew's Jewish Christians believed that they, not the Pharisees, were the true successors to the religion of the Hebrew Bible".<sup>34</sup> Hence the parable of the Householder and the Vineyard in Mt 21:33-46. What is the meaning of this parable? The *Jerusalem Bible* explains it in a note: "The proprietor is God; the vineyard the Chosen People, Israel ... the servants the prophets; the son Jesus, put to death outside the walls of Jerusalem, the murderous farmers the faithless Jews; the nation to which the vineyard will be entrusted, the pagans".<sup>35</sup> The New Testament scholar Josef Schmidt asserts that this parable

contains a type of historical theology which contemplates the guilt of Israel throughout its entire history. The greatest measure of guilt, however, is borne by the contemporary generation to which Jesus speaks, because it delivered the 'beloved son' to death. With that, God's patience is exhausted. The result is Israel's rejection. In its place a new spiritual Israel is called and established by God from among the Gentiles. 'The people' who are to assume the inheritance of the Jews is a reference to the church.<sup>36</sup>

Thus Matthew has moved from attack upon the Pharisees to the denunciation of Israel as a whole. This is further intensified in the "Seven Woes" against the "hypocrites" in Mt 23.

The Jerusalem-saying in v37 makes this even more explicit. Jerusalem, representing the

<sup>34</sup> Hann, R - *Supercessionism. Engraftment & Jewish Christian Dialogue*; p. 334

<sup>35</sup> p. 49

<sup>36</sup> Lapide, P & Luz, U - *Jesus in Two Perspectives*; p. 101



Jewish nation, is identified as "forsaken" and "desolate". "In Matthew's intention, this means that God is abandoning his people".<sup>37</sup> Because Israel has proved unworthy of the gospel disciples must be made of "all the nations" (28:19). The Greek phrase *panta ta ethne*, here refers to non-Jewish individuals; it does not mandate a mission to all nations, including Israel. Although individual Jews are not to be refused a place in the church, the gospel is henceforth not to be offered to Israel.<sup>38</sup>

## (B) THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel of John was written during the last decade of the century, perhaps in Ephesus. The Jewish-Christian issues underlying John were quite different from those that stood behind Matthew. The institutional breach between church and synagogue had begun to occur by the end of the first century, when Christians found themselves expelled from the synagogue. Animosity to Judaism is found throughout John. First of all, John proclaims a supersessionist theology.<sup>39</sup> John 15:1-17 represents Jesus as "the vine", a symbol for Israel (Hos 10:1, Ezek 15:1-6). Thus, Jesus supersedes Israel.<sup>40</sup> As for the Jews, they have no right to call themselves children of Abraham (8:39f). With respect to the Mosaic Law, it is alien to Christians (8:17; 10:34; 15:25). Jesus ignores it publicly (5:1-17; 9:16). As the one who truly reveals God's will, Jesus has become the Law's replacement (cf. 1:17; 5:39f).<sup>41</sup> Jewish symbols for the Law include bread, light, water and wine. According to John, Jesus

<sup>37</sup> Hare, D - The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels & Acts; p. 39

<sup>38</sup> Hare, D & Harrington, D - Make Disciples of All the Gentiles: Mt 28:19, p. 367

<sup>39</sup> Getty, M - The Jews and John's Passion Narrative; p. 7f

<sup>40</sup> Dodd, C - The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel; p. 410f

<sup>41</sup> Ibid; p. 82-85

is the living bread from heaven (6:32-38) and the light of the world (3:19; 8:12; 9:5). Jesus also transforms the water of Jewish purification into the good wine (2:6-10), and contrasts the water from Jacob's well with his own living water (4:12-15). Moreover, even though the Mosaic Law belongs to the Jews, they themselves have failed to understand it, for they have never known God (5:38-47; 15:21; 16:3). According to John 2:18-22, there is to be no more Jerusalem Temple. Jesus has replaced it with his body.<sup>42</sup> There is also a whole new cult. No longer is worship to be based on sacrifices, rather "worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth" (4:24). The new cult centres around Jesus as the new temple. According to Ezek 47:1; Joel 3:18 and Zech 14:8, living waters are to flow forth from the Jerusalem Temple in the age to come, but John 7:37-39 declares that these waters will flow from the body of Jesus in a messianic celebration of the feast of Tabernacles.<sup>43</sup> This symbolism is further enforced in that Jesus fulfils a scriptural requirement of the Passover Lamb in that none of his bones were broken (19:32-36 cf, Ex 12:46).<sup>44</sup> John 10 depicts Jesus as the door to the sheepfold (v7,9) and as the Good Shepherd of the sheep (vv 11,14). Since the Hebrew Scriptures often depict Israel's leaders as shepherds (Ezek 31:1-24), the passage in the gospel implies that Jesus has replaced the traditional Jewish leadership. The Jewish leaders are thieves and bandits (v1).<sup>45</sup>

The second indication of John's animosity toward Judaism is his portrayal of the Jewish people. A recurring theme is the hostility of "the Jews". John labels all of Jesus' opponents "Jews". Other gospels identify those opposing Jesus as particular groups within Judaism,

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<sup>42</sup> Schnackenburg, R - *The Gospel According to St John*; p. 352

<sup>43</sup> Brown, R - *The Gospel According to John*; p. 180ff

<sup>44</sup> Ibid; p. 937f

<sup>45</sup> Ibid; p. 395f

eg., Sadducees. Such specific designations give the impression that, although certain cliques within Israel were hostile to Jesus, the Jews as a whole were not. John makes no attempt to avoid all specific designations of the opponents. The effect of this usage is the implication that the Jews as a whole were enemies of Jesus.<sup>46</sup> The Jews oppose Jesus and persecute him throughout his ministry (7:13; 10:31) and their attack reaches its climax in the passion narrative. There, it is specifically the Jews (19:14f) - not merely an anonymous crowd - who cry out for Jesus' blood; and it is the Jews who have the responsibility for carrying out the sentence of death (19:16). Some exegetes understand "the Jews" as a symbol of the evil hostility of the world to God's revelation. The designation "Jews" has typological significance, in that "Jews" signify *par excellence* the wrong attitude toward God.<sup>47</sup>

### (C) THE TEACHING OF PAUL

The Pauline corpus was written in a period of increasing debate within the church as to its relationship to the synagogue. Written over three decades from 40-65 AD, in various locations, Paul provides the fullest treatment of the problem of how the church stands in relation to the synagogue, especially in Romans and Galatians.

Supercessionist theology has traditionally maintained Paul's unmistakable hostility toward the law. Paul speaks not incidentally but fundamentally about the nature of Judaism itself, saying that Christianity has superseded it. Christians are "spiritual" Jews (Rom 2:29),

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, R - The Community of the Beloved Disciple: p. 41

<sup>47</sup> Rahner, K - Spiritual Exercises: p. 235

Abraham's offspring (Gal 3:16, 4:16), the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), the "true circumcision" (Phil 3:3). "Certainly Paul is at odds with Judaism ... with its emphasis on subjection to the law...."<sup>48</sup> Paul appears to attack the very essence of Israel and does so from a position of knowledge. Saul, the Pharisee, the disciple of Gamaliel, has experienced the best that Judaism has to offer and has completely rejected it. "It almost seems that Paul is able to proclaim his gospel of grace only against the dark foil of Jewish legalism".<sup>49</sup> The Judaism reflected in his polemic is a joyless, hypocritical, nationalistic means of earning salvation by mechanically doing the works of the law. Outward observances and ordinances of Judaism, eg., sabbath, food laws and festivals are all part of the "flesh", carried out by carnal men, puffed up in their "sensuous minds" (Col 2:16-19). Furthermore, the lineage of physical descent gives no special rights. Paul uses Gen 15:6 to prove that Abraham is not the father of those who keep the Law in the lineage of physical descent, but the father of those who believe apart from the Law. The God of the Jews is a remote, gloomy tyrant who lays the burden of the law upon men and their response is they either become proud and self-righteous hypocrites who are scrupulous about food but ignore justice, or they are plunged into guilt and anxiety, thinking themselves damned for breaking a single commandment. Against this background, the gospel of freedom from the law is good news indeed and only a stiff-necked stubbornness has kept the Jews from embracing it. As Andrea van Dülmen puts it:

The law of Christ dissolves the Mosaic law as an expression of the divine will and as norm in the life of the believer. The Mosaic law, as law for Israel, as a demand for works which cannot be satisfied by man, comes to an end with Christ.... A distinction between the law according to the letter and the law

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<sup>48</sup> Pitchers, A L M - Paul's Understanding of the Place of the Law - Rom 7; p. 11

<sup>49</sup> Gaston, L - Paul and the Torah: p. 49

according to the spirit corresponds to the relationship between the Mosaic law and the law of Christ.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, she can conclude: "The law in the old aeon is ... a law of works, a law of sin and death", but in the new age "the same law is spiritually ... law of life, of grace and of faith".<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, Paul's gospel of justification by faith alone could be seen as a revival of the faith of Abraham who lived 430 years before the law was given. In between Christ and Abraham was the dark age of the law, which had intruded into history in order to increase sin (Gal 3:19, Rom 5:20), which was given not by God but only by angels (Gal 3:19f) and which functioned at best as a pedagogue and at worst as a jail-keeper (Gal 3:24) until Christ should come to revive Abraham's life of faith. Even if the law were interpreted positively as a means of salvation whereby man might be justified, it had failed, for "by the law, no one is justified before God" (Gal 3:11, Rom 3:20) and thus "Christ is the end of the Law" (Rom 10:4).

Gunther Schiwy interprets Paul this way:

Paul has now made it clear that, if the majority of Jews up to now 'are ignorant' (Rom 10:3) of the sole possible way to salvation, this is not God's fault; even in the Old Testament, in the past of the chosen people, he spoke clearly enough of 'justification by faith', so that the Jews' ignorance would be better described as 'mistaking' God's intentions and this is culpable; they had grown so fond of a 'righteousness from good works' that they finally became blind both to the Old Testament word of God and then also the the New Testament word in Christ. For it is obvious that God spoke clearly enough to the Jews at the time through Christ and still speaks through those authorised by Christ.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cited in Klein, C : Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology; p. 47

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid; p. 97

Turning to the important section of Romans 9-11, supercessionist theology maintains that Paul is not quite willing to declare that historical election of Israel means nothing at all to God, so he invokes an Old Testament concept of the remnant (Rom 11:5). Only a remnant from among this apostate people was intended by God for salvation. This remnant is already represented by the Jewish Christians who have believed.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, God has not rejected his people, for this remnant has been saved. Furthermore, by proclaiming the discovery of a "mystery" (Rom 11:25), Paul affirms a reason for the unbelief of the Jews, as well as God's continued concern for his people's final salvation. According to this "mystery", the Jewish religious community has been hardened, so that the Gentiles might be gathered in. As soon as this ingathering of the Gentiles is complete, God would mysteriously unhardened the hearts of the Jews. This "mystery" in Paul does not suggest in any way an ongoing validity of Judaism as a community of salvation in its own right. For Paul, there is and always has been, only one true covenant of salvation. This is the covenant of the promise, given apart from the law, to Abraham and now manifest in those who believe in Abraham's spiritual son, Christ. The purpose of Paul's "mystery" is not to concede any ongoing validity to Judaism, but rather to assure the ultimate triumph of the church, for if the church has superseded Israel, then this truth must finally be confirmed by the Jews themselves testifying to it.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Hann, R : Supercessionism, Engraftment & Jewish-Christian Dialogue: p. 337

<sup>54</sup> Reuther, R R - Faith and Fratricide: p. 107

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE THEOLOGY OF SUPERCESSIONISM

#### I : INTRODUCTION

The notion that the church has taught a theology of supercessionism over the last two thousand years might be hard for Christians to accept, but to suggest that this tradition brought forth evil fruits of social victimization of Jews and contributed in basic ways to the Nazi "final solution" might be greeted with absolute disbelief, for that would be suggesting that Christian theology is in some sense evil at its root. Yet this idea of a connection between supercessionism and anti-Semitism might not be that far-fetched. If examined carefully, the theology of super-cessionism is what we might call theological anti-Judaism. By this, we mean just as individuals can be free of personal prejudice and still participate actively in a system of racism, so theological anti-Judaism has to do with a religious ideology and its objective effects, whether or not those Christians who believe it subjectively hate Jews. If the three foundations on which Judaism stand are God, the Law and Israel, then a fundamental attack on any one of these three would be anti-Judaism, i.e., a denial of the right of Jews to exist in terms of their own self-understanding.<sup>1</sup> In terms of our definition, supercessionism is theological anti-Judaism, since it attacks both the Law as passed away and completed in Christ and Israel, which has been replaced by another people - the church. The

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SEE FULL DETAILS IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

<sup>1</sup> Gaston, L - Paul and the Torah: p. 50

point of the above is that Christian theology is by no means innocent when it comes to the denigration of Judaism. In the theology of supercessionism, the church might be closer than it dares to admit to an anti-Semitism of some description. The more important question is whether there is any clear link between the theological anti-Judaism found in the theology of supercessionism and the racial anti-Semitism that was so prevalent in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century? This is a very serious question for the church, which must now occupy us.

It is estimated that fewer than twenty per cent of Jews were able to survive as Jews in Christian Europe from the fourth century to the twentieth.<sup>2</sup> The other eighty per cent were destroyed by forced baptism, expulsion, pogroms and finally the Holocaust. The pressures on Jews were enormous : legal, political and economic disabilities, social isolation and ghettoization.

The ancient church tradition of the *Adversus Judaeos* theology, the teaching that the church had superseded the synagogue as the people of God and is thus superior, was infected with racist ideology. Thus, in the twentieth century the *Adversus Judaeos* theology was developed from the protest: "You have no right to live among us as Jews"; to "You have no right to live among us" to finally "You have no right to live".<sup>3</sup>

While it would be historically untrue to blame the Christian church directly for the Nazis' racial anti-Semitism and the monstrous crimes committed by them, it is true to say that the

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, A - The Vatican Council and the Jews: p. 19

<sup>3</sup> Hilberg, R - The Destruction of the European Jews: p. 4



Christian tradition is deeply implicated in these crimes. For it was the church that produced an abiding contempt among Christians for Jews and all things Jewish. For it is inconceivable that sufficient hatred against Jews could have been developed by the Nazis in a few short years to explain the success of their efforts. It was the church that made the Jewish people a symbol of unredeemed humanity; it painted a picture of Jews as a blind, stubborn, carnal and perverse people, an image that was fundamental in Hitler's choice of the Jews as a scapegoat. Indeed, the Nazis themselves, however anti-Christian they were, are inexplicable apart from this tradition. Yet these ideas are not without their detractors.

In the preface to her study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hanna Arendt writes the following lines :

Anti-Semitism, a secular nineteenth century ideology ... and religious Jew hatred, inspired by the mutually hostile antagonism of two conflicting creeds, are obviously not the same; and even the extent to which the former derives its arguments and emotional appeals from the latter is open to question. The notion of an unbroken continuity of persecutions, expulsions and massacres from the end of the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages, to the Modern era, frequently embellished by the idea that modern anti-Semitism is no more than a secularized version of popular medieval superstitions, is ... fallacious....<sup>4</sup>

Thus, she is able to conclude:

The charge against Christianity in general, with its two thousand years of history, cannot be proved, and if it could be proved, it would be horrible.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, for Arendt, modern anti-Semitism is a uniquely modern phenomenon, racial in form and anti-Christian in character. Christendom per se, in her view, was not responsible for anti-Semitism, despite its age-old religious denigration of Judaism.

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<sup>4</sup> Arendt, H - *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 7

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; p. 11

Yet this position bristles with difficulties. The notion of an unbridgeable chasm between the modern world and antiquity or the middle ages runs against the grain of common sense and sound historiography. As it has been said, there are no periods in history, only historians. Besides this, Uriel Tal's study of Germany during the Second Reich (1870-1914) has demonstrated the co-existence and mutual impact of two anti-Semitismisms at that time - one Christian, the other explicitly anti-Christian. The Christian variety, expressed widely by pastors and theologians, clearly has roots in Christian tradition. But even the anti-Christian variety borrowed heavily from Christian sources. Tal observes that "the racial anti-Semites appropriated basic Christian ideas while reprobating them and adapted them for their own purposes".<sup>6</sup> As Jules Isaac has observed, the church's theological anti-Judaism was the "powerful trunk, with deep and multiple roots, upon which have been grafted other varieties of anti-Semitism".<sup>7</sup>

These are bold claims, yet they receive support from a completely different source. In attempting to understand the interrelatedness of theological anti-Judaism in the theology of supersessionism and anti-Semitism, we must turn to the sociological study of modern American attitudes in *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* by Charles Glock and Rodney Stark. Using extensive survey data to test the hypothesis that anti-Semitism in modern America has clear religious roots within the Christian church, they discovered three components in the dynamics of anti-Semitism such as beliefs, feelings and actions. They maintain that, given negative images of historic Jews, for example, as Christ-killers, and a predominance of the belief that only a narrow sphere of persons qualify as properly religious,

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<sup>6</sup> Christians and Jews in Germany: p. 304

<sup>7</sup> Has Anti-Semitism Roots in Christianity: p. 56

and that other persons and groups are religiously illegitimate, the model "overwhelmingly predicted a hostile religious image of the contemporary Jew".<sup>8</sup>

They conclude that:

not only is anti-Semitism very characteristic of Christian church members, but all of these aspects, [beliefs, feelings, actions] of anti-Semitism were found to be strongly correlated with our model of the religious sources of anti-Semitism.<sup>9</sup>

Besides this, the strongest evidence of a connection between theological anti-Judaism in the church and the anti-Semitism of the secular type comes in a survey of the history of the Jews in Christian Europe over the past two millenniums.

## II A HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN CHRISTIAN EUROPE

The situation under which Jews lived in Christian countries, from the fourth century into the twentieth, has been one of almost constant decline. The decline began in the fourth century, since it was then that the church's theological stance towards Jews was eventually, after Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, translated into an imperial legislation that excluded the Jews from the body of society and placed them in a situation of legal oppression. The church's spiritual negation of Jewish existence thus found expression in social and political terms. At that point, theological anti-Judaism changed from an oral and literary tradition into a cultural force.

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<sup>8</sup> p. 130

<sup>9</sup> p. 161

Beginning from the fourth century onwards, the church began to persuade emperors and local rulers to place more and more restrictions on Jewish rights. In AD 315 Constantine the Great, the emperor who made Christianity a tolerated religion, but issued two laws which severely curtailed the rights of Jews as citizens. Wanting to have "nothing to do with the most hostile Jews", Constantine decreed death at the stake for any Jew who attempted to lure a converted Jew from Christianity back to Judaism. The second law made it a crime to become a Jew by conversion.<sup>10</sup> This legislation was built upon further by his son Constantius. In AD 339, it became a capital crime for a Jewish man to marry a Christian woman. It was decreed that Jews may not own slaves "of another sect", and converting a slave to Judaism carried the death penalty. Should a Jew buy a Christian slave, "all ... slaves who are found in his possession shall at once be removed".<sup>11</sup> This edict put Jews at an economic disadvantage, since many forms of economic activity, such as agriculture, were thereby essentially closed to them. In addition, it was an effort to inhibit conversion to Judaism. In AD 439, Theodosius II excluded Jews from any worthwhile office in the state, though they were required to hold incumbent ones. The building of new synagogues was forbidden. Any new synagogues that were built were to be confiscated by the church.<sup>12</sup> These decrees brought about a considerable decline in the legal status of Jews. Many were compelled to leave industry and agriculture for smaller crafts. They were barred from holding state office, from the army, from civil administration, and from the profession of law. The Code of Justinian was issued in AD 534, effective for the eastern Empire, but influential in the West in the Middle Ages. Justinian curtailed significant Jewish rights, notably the

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<sup>10</sup> Parkes, J - The Conflict of Church and Synagogue; p. 178

<sup>11</sup> Ibid; p. 179

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; p. 233ff

legality of Judaism itself.<sup>13</sup> In the economic sphere, Justinian made Jewish ownership of slaves even more difficult than before and further restricted Jews' ability to own property. Exclusions from certain spheres of civil service were more radically implemented. Jews were disallowed from giving evidence in law cases. Old legislation was continued against conversions to Judaism and inter-marriage. The ban against building new synagogues and repairing old ones remained unchanged. This was done to make the practice of Judaism difficult and to ensure that the physical appearance of synagogues gave evidence of their worldly character. Justinian regulated the beliefs and services of the synagogue, prohibiting portions of the service and even decreeing which translations were to be read in the synagogue. Justinian's code prepared the way for further encroachment on Jewish rights. In Borian in North Africa in AD 535, Judaism was declared illegal, Jews were forced to be baptized and synagogues were closed. Jews were banned from virtually all professions, even medicine was limited, since Christians were forbidden to patronize Jewish doctors. Extension of all these restrictions created eventually the total exclusion of Jews from normal life.<sup>14</sup>

The laws of the state had a clear parallel in the declarations of the church and in most instances were reflections of church practice and doctrine. Edward Flannery makes this clear:

The solidarity of canonical and imperial legislation is obvious. While maintaining the equities of traditional Roman law, the imperial legislation reflected the spirit and often the letter of the canons of the church councils, and in many instances implemented them in the capacity of a 'secular arm'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Williamson, C M - Has God Rejected His People?; p. 111

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; p. 12

<sup>15</sup> The Anguish of the Jews; p. 56

No less than ninety-six church councils and one hundred and fourteen popes issued edicts against the Jews, scorning and disinheriting them. So numerous were the laws passed by local and ecumenical councils of the church regarding Jewish-Christian relations that we can give some sense of them only by listing a few. Yet we must list them from a unique perspective. As Hans Küng says:

The mass murder of Jews by the Nazis was the work of godless criminals, but without the almost 2000-year history of 'Christian' anti-Judaism .... it would have been impossible.... None of the anti-Jewish measures taken by the Nazis - marked clothing, exclusion from various occupations, the prohibition of mixed marriages, plundering, expulsion, concentration camps, outright slaughter and cremation was new. All of these were already a part of medieval Christendom.<sup>16</sup>

Raul Hilberg concurs in his monumental work on Hitler's destruction of the Jews. He constructed a chart to buttress his claim that the Nazis "did not discard the past; they built on it. They did not begin a development; they completed it".<sup>17</sup> Hilberg's table is reflected as follows:

### HILBERG'S TABLE:

#### Church Law and Nazi Anti-Jewish Measures

<u>Canon Law</u>	<i>Nazi Measures</i>
Ban on marriage and sexual relations between Christians and Jews (Synod of Elvira, 306).	Law for the Protection of German Blood and German honour (15 September 1935)
Ban on Jews and Christians eating together (Synod of Elvira, 306)	Jews banned from using restaurant cars (Transport Minister to the Minister of the Interior, 30 December 1939).

<sup>16</sup> The Church; p. 138

<sup>17</sup> The Destruction of the European Jews; p. 4

<u>Canon Law</u>	<i>Nazi Measures</i>
Jews are not allowed to hold public office (Synod of Clermont, 535).	Law for the Restoration of Civil Service (7 April 1933).
Jews are not allowed to keep Christian servants, maids or slaves (Third Synod of Orleans, 538)	Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour (15 September 1935).
Jews are not allowed to show themselves in the streets during Holy Week (Third Synod of Orleans, 538).	Police order authorizing local authorities to ban Jews from the streets on certain days (eg: on Nazi festivals).
Burning of the Talmud and other Jewish Writings (Twelfth Synod of Toledo, 681).	Burning of books in Nazi Germany.
Christians are forbidden to consult Jewish doctors (Trullan Synod, 692).	Fourth Ordinance in the Reich Civil Law of 15 July 1938.
Christians are not allowed to live with Jews (Synod of Narbonne, 1050).	Order of Goering of 28 December 1938, that Jews are to be concentrated in certain houses (Borman to Rosenberg, 17 January 1939).
Jews must pay tithes to the church like Christians (Synod of Gerona, 1078). Ban on work on Sunday (Synod of Szabolco, 1092).	The "Offering of Social Compensation" of 24 December 1940, in accordance with which Jews had to pay a special income tax to balance the Party contributions imposed on the Nazis.
Jews may not lay charges against Christians and cannot be witnesses against Christians (Third Lateran Council, 1179).	Proposal by the Party Chancery to ban Jews from bringing civil suits, 9 September 1942 (Bormann to Minister of Justice).
Jews forbidden to disinherit fellow- believers who have gone over to Christianity (Third Lateran Council, 1179).	Authorization by the Ministry of Justice to declare void wills which offend the "healthy sensibility of the people" (32 July 1938).
Jews must wear a distinctive sign on their clothing (Fourth Lateran Council 1215). The model was a decree of Caliph Omar I, 634-44, that Christians must wear blue and Jews yellow girdles.	Ordinance of 1 September 1941.
Ban on building synagogues (Council of Oxford, 1222).	Destruction of synagogues throughout the Reich on 10 November 1938 (Heydrich to Goering, 11 November 1938).
Christians are not allowed to take part in Jewish festivities (Synod of Vienna, 1267). Jews may not dispute with ordinary people about the Catholic faith (Synod of Vienna, 1267).	Ban on friendly relations with Jews 24 October 1941 (Gestapo order).

<u>Canon Law</u>	<i>Nazi Measures</i>
Jews may live only in Jewish quarters (compulsory ghettos). Synod of Breslau, 1267).	Order by Heydrich, 21 September 1939.
Christians are not allowed to sell or lease land to Jews (Synod of Ofen, 1267).	Ordinance of 3 December 1937, which provided for the compulsory purchase of Jewish land.
The Conversion of a Christian to Judaism or the return of a baptized Jew to his former religion is to be treated as proven heresy. (Synod of Mainz, 1310).	The conversion of Christians to Judaism exposes them to the danger of being treated as Jews (Decision of the Königsberg Court, 26 June 1942).
Jews may not negotiate contracts between Christians especially as marriage brokers (Council of Basel, 1434).	Law of 6 July 1938 on the dissolution of Jewish estate agencies and marriage bureaux with non-Jewish clients was passed.
Jews may not acquire any academic degrees (Council of Basel, 1434).	Law against the over-filling of German schools and universities (25 April 1933)

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The Middle Ages is marked for Jews living in Christian Europe, not only as the age of the ghetto but the age of the devil. The outbreak of the Black Plague in the mid-fourteenth century, which killed a third of the total population of Europe, unleashed a number of consequences. Everywhere devils came to be seen in the face of "the Jew". The fact that the hygienic character of Jewish life occasionally spared it somewhat from destruction by the plague, only added to the paranoia. It was believed that a conspiracy of Jews had poisoned the sources of water with magically cursed bags of excrement and menstrual blood, which through secret tunnels flowed through all of Europe.<sup>18</sup> Jews were regarded as an insidious disease secretly poisoning the life system of Christendom, an image which was to be renewed in such potent form in racial ideology. All over Europe pogroms broke out against the

<sup>18</sup> Ibid: p.5 and 6.

<sup>19</sup> Poliakov, L - History of Anti-Semitism; pp. 123-154



Jewish community. This conspiracy accusation was unique for "the first time we are dealing with charges that Jewry is plotting the destruction of all Christendom, with the help of a very learned and precise method".<sup>20</sup> Other popular charges had preceded the one of well-poisoning. In 1144 the first charge of ritual murder appeared. A young boy's corpse was found, near the city of Norwich, England. Rumours were spread that local rabbis had decided to murder a young Christian every Spring, to ridicule the suffering of Jesus. They believed that Jews used the blood of the child to make *matzos*, the unleavened bread with which Passover is celebrated.<sup>21</sup> One Jew was killed as a result of the incident at Norwich.<sup>22</sup> More important was that accusation seemed to spread. Around the end of the century, it arose again in a number of English towns - Gloucester, Bury St Edmunds, Bristol and Winchester. It crossed the channel to France, where it first appeared at Blois in 1171.<sup>23</sup> The first charge of ritual murder in Germany was in Wurzburg in 1147. When finally the rumours died down, about one hundred and fifty recorded cases had occurred.<sup>24</sup> Thirty-eight Jews were burned at the stake in Blois and twenty years later, one hundred were slain at Bray-sur-Seine. Thus, "accusations of ritual murder... gradually replaced the Crusades as a pretext for mass exterminations".<sup>25</sup> In 1096, the first Crusade had taken place. The crusaders of Rouen are reported to have said "We have set out to march on a long road against the enemies of God in the East, and, behold, before our eyes are the Jews, His worst foes. To ignore them is preposterous."<sup>26</sup> Down the Rhine and Danube valleys, incited by preachers like Peter the Hermit, crusading mobs offered Jews the choice of baptism or death.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid; p. 105

<sup>21</sup> Marcus, J - (ed) - The Jew in the Medieval World; pp. 121-126

<sup>22</sup> Poliakov, L - History of Anti-Semitism; p. 58

<sup>23</sup> Marcus, J - (ed) - The Jew in the Medieval World; pp. 127-130

<sup>24</sup> Flannery, E - The Anguish of the Jews; pp. 88-89

<sup>25</sup> Poliakov, L - History of Anti-Semitism; p. 62

<sup>26</sup> Parkes, J - The Jew in the Medieval Community; pp. 65-66

An estimated ten thousand Jews died.<sup>27</sup> The accusation did not die in the Middle Ages, but survived well into the modern era. The same indictment was made against Jews in eighteenth-century Poland, in Russia, Germany, and France in the late nineteenth century, again in Russia in 1911. Four years after Hitler's defeat, the ritual murder accusation arose twice in Bavaria.<sup>28</sup> Closely related to ritual murder was the charge of the profanation of the Host. As the doctrine of transubstantiation began to take hold, this new accusation began to appear. The belief was that Jews were stealing consecrated wafers from church altars and desecrating them. Since the wafer was the real body of Jesus, Jews were determined to crucify him again. This was done by piercing the wafer with knives. The wafer would then bleed. More than one hundred cases of Host desecration are on record.<sup>29</sup> One case in Röttingen in 1298 resulted in a major outbreak of mass murder. A Christian named Rindfleisch urged a mob who massacred every Jew in Röttingen. The armed mob then scoured the countryside for the next six months, looting, burning and slaughtering all Jews except those who accepted baptism.<sup>30</sup> Thus the image of the Jew deteriorated in the minds of Christians to that of a deformed monster, with horns, tail, cloven hoofs and sulphuric smell to betray his fundamentally diabolic nature. The communication mediums of the day: drama, woodcuts and printing furthermore stamped this popular image of the Jew on the minds of Europeans and it remained the basic image until its use by the Nazis.

For Christians, the period from about the sixth century to the Reformation is generally thought of as the Middle Ages, but from the world-view of the Jew, this thousand year

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<sup>27</sup> Flannery, E - The Anguish of the Jews; p. 92

<sup>28</sup> Hilberg, R - The Destruction of European Jews; p. 678

<sup>29</sup> Poliakov, L - History of Anti-Semitism; p. 63

<sup>30</sup> Ibid; p. 99

medieval period looks fundamentally different. For Jews the Middle Ages extended virtually into the twentieth century, for it was only when the secular revolutionaries suspended the legal structures of Christianity as the established state religion, were legal disabilities for Jews dissolved.

For Jews, the epoch of the ghetto lasted into the nineteenth century in Western Europe and into the twentieth in Eastern Europe. The French Revolution discontinued the Anti-Judaic laws in France in 1789, and Napoleon carried this revolution with him during his wars of conquest. Yet, soon after Napoleon's defeat, anti-Jewish restrictions were reinstated in many places. It was only between 1848 and 1870 that the ghetto was disbanded and full citizenship attained generally in Western Europe. In Germany, it was not until the Weimar Republic that all disabilities were dropped. In Eastern Europe, the pogroms of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries mingled the old religions with new racial charge against Jews. The ghetto was dissolved with the Russian Revolution but, for much of Eastern Europe, the world of the ghetto was swept away, not by enfranchisement but by the Holocaust.<sup>31</sup>

We must adjust our sense of periodization when looking at European history from the perspective of the Jews, for what is the medieval world for Christians, abandoned centuries before Nazism, contained no such break for Jews. The medieval world, for Jews, lasted until the revival of anti-Semitism in racial form. When it is comprehended that the continuation of the medieval status of the Jew continued down into the modern period, then

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<sup>31</sup> Schweitzer, F - History of the Jews; p. 185-280

suddenly the imagined discontinuity between medieval anti-Judaism based in the *Adversus Judaeos* theology and Nazism narrows to uncomfortable proximity.<sup>32</sup> We begin to understand that what Nazism revived was not a long-dead set of attitudes and practices but an epoch only recently dismantled in the West, still maintained in the East, whose myths were still alive, and only needed the right combination of factors to once again revive.

It was the very process of enfranchisement of the Jewish people in Europe which, ironically, reunified anti-Judaism in new forms. The basis for contempt was changing from theological to nationalist and then racial grounds. Whereas, in the medieval period, the state was intolerant of the religious alien, the modern state was intolerant of the person of alien national identity. It had no place for Jewish self-government, such as was possible in the medieval corporate state. The Jew in the modern state became the representative of the alien to national identity but the same stereotypes of Jews were preserved in this change of ideological grounds. While philosophical liberalism had provided the theoretical basis for enfranchisement of Jews in Europe, it at the same time laid a basis for a transition from religious to nationalist anti-Semitism.<sup>33</sup>

In Eastern Europe the pogroms in Poland in the mid-seventeenth century and the continual oppression of Russian Jews from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries drove Eastern Jewry again Westward, seeking entry to areas where they had previously been evicted. In Western Europe, in those places where Jews were allowed to take up residence, the laws of the ghetto remained fully in force until the mid-eighteenth century. The first to

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<sup>32</sup> Davis, A - On Religious Myths and Their Secular Translation: p. 189

<sup>33</sup> Reuther, R - Faith and Fratricide: p. 215

emerge from the ghetto were the so-called court Jews, wealthy Jews who were given additional privileges of residence, extra-ghetto housing, the right to discard the Jewish dress, to marry, to pass on their privileges to their children, all restricted for ordinary Jews. In return, they acted as special financial agents for princes, especially in German principalities. This role of the court Jews was a continuation of the medieval status of the servants of the prince. These rights granted to court Jews underline the encumbrance of most Jews, for they were rights conferred on any other ordinary citizen. These rights the court Jew had to buy by regular payment of protection money. The role of the court Jew gave birth to Jewish banker-diplomat, which reached its zenith in the House of Rothschild. But this also became the basis for a revival of anti-Semitism. No legend was more widely believed in the late nineteenth century than the idea that "the Jews" controlled international banking and trade and were the secret government of the world. But this attack on "Jewish money" took place at a time when this development had almost entirely been assumed by non-Jews.<sup>34</sup>

Even liberalism, with which Jews allied themselves in their struggle for enfranchisement fostered vital ambivalences toward them. The price for enfranchisement for Jews was one of cultural assimilation. Most rationalist thinkers actually believed that this was the way for Jewish conversion to Christianity. All liberals took it for granted that ghetto Judaism represented a degenerate moral, spiritual and intellectual state. Talmudic Judaism, as the religious basis of the self-governing Jewish community, must be given up. The price of enfranchisement was the destruction of self-government and autonomous corporate identity. It was this autonomous corporate identity which had allowed Jews to keep a sense of

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<sup>34</sup> Parkes, J - A History of the Jewish People: p. 145

peoplehood within Christian society. But it was this very peoplehood which the modern nationalist state could not tolerate and which became the basis of modern anti-Semitism. Now Jewish identity in an ethnic sense was seen as fundamentally evil. It must be dissolved so that the Jew could become a European.

It is fair to say that the church throughout this whole period never really engaged in conversation with Judaism, but rather used it as an antithesis to Christianity. Talmudic Judaism was seen as retrograde, bigoted, immoral, fossilized religion, which had to be overcome in order for mankind to progress. Strangely enough, these ideas were even extended to Christianity itself. Christianity and Jesus were in no way "Jewish". Christianity was seen as the universal religion of nature or reason, which arose as the antithesis and negation of Judaism. It was this universal, natural religion which became the basis on which the Enlightenment sought the unity of all men and women beneath their religious differences. Christian rationalists identified this with the heart of Christianity. What was despised in biblical revealed religion was typecast as Jewish, while all progressive values of spirituality, rationality and universality were the peculiarity of Christianity. Thus, Jews were offered an ideology of enfranchisement, which was itself based on a Christian rationalist version of *Adversus Judaeos*.<sup>35</sup>

For rationalist thinkers, what was wrong with the Jews was regarded as cultural. Jews could be enfranchised if they ceased to be Jews culturally, becoming secular. For conservative Christians, on the other hand, what was wrong with Jews was considered to be intrinsic to

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<sup>35</sup>

Katz, J - Out of the Ghetto: p. 57-59

Jewish character. Bigotry, immorality, legalism, carnality and lack of spiritual or ethical principles were regarded as intrinsic traits that expressed the nature of the Jews. In the seventeenth century, a tradition of anti-Jewish scholarship was developed which distorted and quoted out of context negative statements throughout Jewish tradition concerning Gentiles. Out of this was created a polemical parody of Judaism that was presented as its teachings against Christians. This type of scholarship is embodied by J A Eisenmanger's *Judaism Revealed* (1700).<sup>36</sup> These views were reprinted continually from the eighteenth century to the Nazi era and became a part of the arguments for and against enfranchisement.

Liberal philosophers and conservative Christians' definition of religion, either as the universal, natural religion of reason, or else as profound inwardness, both regard Judaism as the antithesis of true religion. Since Judaism was not a religion, it came to be defined in these traditions in nationalist, quasi-racial terms. Judaism was said to be not a religion but a foreign nation. The antithesis between Christianity and Judaism was translated into an antithesis between Jews and Europeans. But the basic stereotype of Judaism as the antithesis of Christian salvific principles continued beneath this secular transmutation.<sup>37</sup> Now Jews were unassimilable since they represented a foreign essence which was the opposite to all that was spiritual, noble, true in European culture. It was not until the advent of racist anthropology in the late nineteenth century that this view received its full blown racial overtones.

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<sup>36</sup> Reuther, R - Faith and Fratricide: p. 219

<sup>37</sup> Davis, A - On Religious Myths and their Secular Translation: p. 189

The processes of Jewish enfranchisement coincided with huge changes in European society in the revolutionary era which replaced the old Christian society with a secular, liberal industrialised order. Thus, the process through which Jews entered mainstream society also created a traumatic reaction in those classes - clerics, landholders and lower-middle-class artisans, who were deeply intimidated by the new-order. As the beneficiaries of secularism the enfranchised secular Jew became the symbolic representative of the disintegration of the old Christian era to these intimidated classes. Enfranchised Jews came to be fantasized as a type of surreptitious sickness, flowing through the veins of Christian Europe, eroding its spiritual, moral and economic energy. They were conceived to be the creators of all the forces represented by the new secular industrial state. The traditional stereotype of the Jew as a carnal man, which mingled religious and economic anti-Semitism, every conspiring against both wealth and faith of Europe, was brought into play to create the new myth that everything which these threatened groups hated in the new order was intrinsically Jewish.<sup>38</sup>

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a cardinal instrument of this myth. Produced by the Russian secret police in the late nineteenth century, its roots lay in Russian anti-Judaic mysticism. The *Protocols* suggested a Jewish secret government, in existence since the time of Christ, was plotting the overthrow of Christianity and the establishment of the reign of the Devil over the world in the last age of world history. The *Protocols* thus provided a clear association between Christian anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Reuther, R - *Faith and Fratricide*: p. 222

<sup>39</sup> Parkes, J - *A History of the Jewish People*: p. 195



Nazism arose as the final inheritor of religious and secular anti-Semitism. The racial theory was new, but the stereotypes of animosity were old. The Jew, who is the eternal conspiratorial enemy of the Christian faith, was being shaped to serve as the scapegoat for all the problems of the new secular industrial society. European society was ready to undergo a prodigious purge of a dangerous infection that it felt was threatening its very foundation. The Jew had long been fashioned in Christian history to serve as the symbol of this disease from which the Christian must purge himself in order to save himself. Under the banner "the Jews are our misfortune", mass paranoia gripped the heart of Europe, but in the language of racism and deliberately engineered by experts in mass communication.<sup>40</sup>

In 1933, when the Nazis came to power, there began the systematic reassertion of anti-Jewish laws which reversed the gains made by enfranchisement.<sup>41</sup> Jews were again reduced to persons without rights, citizenship, or means of existence. First, Jews were excluded from all civil offices, including education and the judiciary. They were expelled from the army and from the legal profession and, as much as possible, from medicine. Then, they were denied citizenship altogether and forbidden to inter-marry with Aryans or employ them in their homes. Finally, the Crystal Night of 1938 saw a co-ordinated attack on Jewish businesses, homes and synagogues throughout the Reich. Children were abused and ridiculed in school and Jews were forced to wear the yellow Star of David and began to be rounded up for detention. The *Talmud* and books by Jewish writers were burned. The Jews were being marked down for final elimination, although the decision to exterminate

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid - Anti-Semitism; p. 87-103

<sup>41</sup> As indicated above, p. 35ff

them, rather than expel, came about only when all avenues to emigration were closed with the war.<sup>42</sup>

The Christian background to the Aryan laws is illustrated by an incident reported in Hitler's Table Talk. Here, he reports that two bishops came to confront him on the issue of Nazi racial policy. Hitler replied that he was only putting into effect what Christianity had preached and practised for 2000 years.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, the Nazis found a precedent in Martin Luther. Julius Streicher, the editor of *Der Stürmer*, cited Luther at his Nuremberg trial to justify his actions.<sup>44</sup> In 1543, at the end of his life, Luther wrote three derogatory treatises against Jews, which anti-Semites would quote for the next four hundred years. One of these treatises is *On the Jews and their Lies*. In it, Luther called the Jews "venomous, bitter worms" and "disgusting vermin". He further asserted that they were all thieves and should be deported to Palestine. He made numerous suggestions concerning treatment of the Jewish people throughout the treatise, including these:

What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews?.... I shall give you my sincere advice. First, set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honour of our Lord and of Christendom.... Second, I advise that their houses be razed and destroyed.... Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb.... Fifth, I advise that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the country-side, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like. Let them stay at home .... Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping....

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Schweitzer, F - *A History of the Jews*, p. 222

<sup>44</sup> Parkes, J - *Anti-Semitism*, p. 87-103

Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an axe, a hoe, a spade, a distaff or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow.<sup>45</sup>

Even the Confessing Church proved, peculiarly, unable to confront the issue of anti-Semitism itself, theologically or practically. It took its stand instead in opposition to German Christianity in the name of "pure doctrine".<sup>46</sup> Even Bonhoeffer, the hero of the resistance, was tragically handicapped by his own theological anti-Judaism. It is significant that he declared before the war that, if the church applied the Aryan laws to its own membership, it would be guilty of slipping into legalistic, i.e. Jewish principles, making the Christian community, in effect, a "Jewish" community. A good example from Bonhoeffer is located in his lectures of 1934 where he remarks that the Jews should have never been expelled from Europe. They must remain, for Christians, as a negative witness to Christ, the exemplification of divine wrath.<sup>47</sup> Bonhoeffer's heart was sound, but his arguments against racism and anti-Semitism were themselves strongly anti-Jewish. For most churchmen, of all denominations, the fact that the Nazis declared themselves anti-Communist, anti-liberal and anti-Semitic was enough to guarantee that they were on the side of Christianity and the restoration of Christendom.

Thus, to dismiss Christian complicity in modern anti-Semitism is to defy an immense weight of evidence as well as to support a false Christian consciousness that prevents any serious explanation of Christian responsibility. The two types of Judenhass, ancient and modern, religious and secular, theological and racial, nurtured in the churches and universities,

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<sup>45</sup> Translated by Bertram, M - Luther Works; Vol 47; pp. 268-272

<sup>46</sup> Barth, K - The German Church Conflict; pp. 16-17

<sup>47</sup> Robertson, E - (ed) - Collected Works; Vol I; pp. 226-227

conspired together, however unwittingly, in the twentieth century to commit the greatest mass crime in the history of Europe.

In proving our point that there is a clear link between theological anti-Judaism and racial anti-Semitism, we must be careful not to overstate the case. To be fair, nationalist, racial anti-Semitism contained a crucial element that went far beyond the framework of theological anti-Judaism. It was now Jewish peoplehood that must be destroyed, in so far as it impeded the nationalism of the modern state. This meant that the massacres conducted in the name of racial anti-Semitism now came from the state itself, whereas in the Middle Ages, violence had always come from the mob, while the state had been the protector of the ghetto Jew. Pogroms from mobs were standard practice but theological anti-Judaism has never been genocidal. The church demonised the Jew religiously, not racially. It maintained that the Jew, because of his rejection of Christ, should be kept in perpetual misery -a sign of his reprobate status before God, but at the same time, the church sought to preserve him, physically and even religiously, that he might be converted. Once converted, such persons were Christians, not Jews. But we must appreciate that these distinctions escaped the uncomplicated minds of most Christians. Most conventional Christians heard it repeated again and again that the Jew was the Devil incarnate, the personalized expression of evil. They experienced Jews as persons segregated into unpleasant roles as merchants and tax-collectors and they hated them without any enigmatic desire to preserve them for a later conversion. The church therefore must take responsibility for creating this cultural role of the Jews, even though its results were contrary to its strict intentions. In Christian terms, the "final solution" to the Jewish problem was one of conversion. It demanded preservation of

the Jews until such time. The "final solution", according to the Nazis, could only be extermination. The demonic character of Jewishness was no longer a mode of belief that could be converted but a biological being that would not be redeemed. Human vermin are not convertible.<sup>48</sup> The church had thought of Jewishness as a demonic religion. However the Jew was conceived as a person redeemable. The confusion of the two beliefs prepared Europeans for the racial theories of the Nazis. This ordinary European simply heard both the church and the Nazis say that the Jews were reprehensible and that the basic Nazi message that the Jews were to be robbed, expelled and finally killed in accord perfectly with long held "Christian" beliefs.

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<sup>48</sup> Reuther, R R - Old Problems and New Dimensions, p. 250

## PART 2

# THE ANSWER

## CHAPTER THREE

### A CRITIQUE OF THE THEOLOGY OF SUPERCESSIONISM

#### I : INTRODUCTION

As we have clearly shown the church can by no means claim innocence with regard to the destruction of the Jews of Europe. In the light of the facts the church is deeply implicated in injustices inflicted over the centuries on Jews. As we have also seen, social injustice stemmed from theological beliefs, concerning the state of the Jewish religion and Christianity's subsequent supercession of it. Consequently, the impact of the implications of the Holocaust brings us to an impasse for it is impossible for the church to preach the gospel as it has in its past. The question which faces us is whether it is possible to preach the gospel without at the same time denigrating Judaism or is it that anti-Judaism is too deeply embedded in the foundations of the church's theology to be rooted out entirely without destroying the whole structure?<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps the theological question for Christians in our generation, yet the answer to the first question rests largely on the second. Is anti-

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SEE FULL DETAILS IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

<sup>1</sup> Reuther, R R - Faith & Fratricide. p.228

Judaism grounded in the New Testament itself or is it a deformation of the gospel that was developed later in Christian theology?

Scholars like Gregory Baum and Rosemary Reuther believed there could be no saving of the New Testament from the charge of anti-Judaism, since the writings of the canon reflected a fundamental hostility towards Judaism. As Reuther says:

the anti-Judaic myth is neither a superficial nor a secondary element in Christian thought. The foundations of anti-Judaic thought were laid in the New Testament. The wheat and the tares have grown together from the beginning, and so it may seem impossible to pull up the weed without uprooting the seed of Christian faith as well.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, scholars like Jacques Maritain and Charles Journet readily acknowledged some anti-Jewish trends in Christian preaching, but thought it their religious duty as Christian theologians to defend the New Testament itself from the accusation of prejudice and falsification, believing anti-Judaism to be due to later developments. For if it could be shown that anti-Jewish trends in Christian theology were peripheral and accidental, not grounded in the New Testament itself, then it would be fairly easy to purify the preaching of the church from anti-Jewish bias.

Some scholars have chosen to steer clear of the New Testament altogether and, until quite recently, later Christian literature, eg., the church fathers, has received more attention than canonical writings. One underlying reason for this is no doubt the fact that for Western Christianity the New Testament stands as the foundation of the faith. Thus, at the deepest

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid; p.226

level, the challenge represented by scholars like Baum and Reuther indicates a profound theological crisis in which nothing less than faith itself is at stake.

Nowhere is the crisis depicted more sharply than in Lloyd Gaston's essay, *Paul and the Torah*:

It may be that the church will survive if we fail to deal adequately with that question, but more serious is the question whether the church ought to survive. A Christian Church with an anti-Semitic New Testament is abominable, but a Christian Church without a New Testament is inconceivable.<sup>3</sup>

The problem is most acute for we who acknowledge some anti-Jewish themes within the New Testament itself. The theological solution must be to seek a point within the canon - in our case Paul - from which to develop a more acceptable Christian view of Israel and Judaism. We share a commitment that true Christianity must be entirely free of anti-Judaism. Authentic Christianity cannot serve to justify later anti-Semitism. Instead, it must allow for the full religious autonomy and authenticity of Judaism alongside Christianity.

This commitment will take shape in an effort to interpret various New Testament texts, mainly Paul, so as to demonstrate that traditional interpretations, not just within classical Western Christianity but among modern biblical scholars as well, are thoroughly wrong.

Obviously, this is an enormously difficult task, but at the very least, assumptions about the meaning of New Testament texts have to be challenged. In a sense we have no other choice, since the experience of the Holocaust has engendered a new appreciation of how these texts have influenced subsequent Western history, causing us to return to the text itself

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<sup>3</sup> p.48



with a new set of questions. For “it is Paul who has provided the theoretical structure for Christian anti-Judaism, from Marcion through Luther and F C Baur down to Bultmann ....”<sup>4</sup>

Jews are particularly sensitive to this issue. As the Jewish ecumenist, Lester Dean, notes: “Considering the horrible anti-Jewish sentiment that has been fostered by many of the Christian interpretations of Paul, Christians should feel compelled to seek alternative understandings of Paul.”<sup>5</sup> But we must ask, is the so-called anti-Judaism truly Paul's own or does it belong to the interpretative assumptions of his readers? Furthermore, is it possible to develop a different reading of Paul in which he is no longer guilty of anti-Judaism?

Thus, our task is to attempt to develop a critique of supercessionism by returning to the canon. Here, we shall seek to undermine the basis of the charge of deicide against the Jewish people, by critically accessing the passion narratives of the gospels of Matthew and John. The main part of our critique, however, will deal with Paul. Here we shall undertake to completely dismantle the long-held and dominant approach of supercessionism by submitting some Pauline works to a revisionist reading.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Bursting the Bonds? - A Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Jesus and Paul, p. 129

## II : THE GOSPELS

### A MATTHEW

As we have already noted in our examination of the teaching of supercessionism the themes of deicide and exile play a large role in the church's understanding of Israel. The idea that the Jews killed Christ and have been punished for it, has been a popular concept in the church's theology and has been expressed by numerous generations of Christian thinkers.

In order to undermine this pattern of belief, we have to access critically the historical accuracy of the Jewish trial in the Gospel of Mark, since Matthew does not seem to employ any source but Mark.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, we must reinterpret parts of Matthew's theology in order to neutralize some of the acid of his anti-Judaism.

As it has been pointed out to us by many scholars, the gospels were not written as historical accounts of the life and death of Jesus, but rather as proclamations of faith.<sup>7</sup> Each writer had apologetic and polemical motives. At the time of the writing of Matthew, the church was experiencing persecution by the Roman authorities. This presented obstacles for the newly emerging Gentile mission. As a result, it became important to the church to minimize Roman responsibility for the death of Jesus, while, at the same time exaggerating the guilt of the Jews. Only in this way could the church hope to mitigate the persecution of its members and convince the Roman authorities to tolerate the new religion. "It would not have been

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<sup>6</sup> Sloyan, G S - Jesus on Trial, p.126

<sup>7</sup> Lietzmann, H - The Beginnings of the Christian Church, p.73

helpful if Christian documents made it clear that Jesus had been executed as a threat to public order by an official of the empire."<sup>8</sup>

Crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish penalty; an execution reserved for those who resisted Roman domination. "The religious Sanhedrin," states Solomon Zeitlin, "had the right to inflict only four modes of capital punishment: stoning, burning, decapitation and strangling."<sup>9</sup> Jewish law strictly forbade crucifixion. There is evidence that, by the end of the reign of Herod, the Sanhedrin had lost all power to impose capital punishment.<sup>10</sup> Matthew faced the problem that these facts were well known. Since Jesus was crucified (a Roman punishment) and since the superscription over the cross read "The King of the Jews" (a political charge), it was clear that Jesus had died at the hands of Roman authorities. He was condemned and executed under Roman law as a political rebel. For no other reason, the church risked being regarded as a threat to the Empire. Anxious to forestall the Roman government's repressive measures against the church, Matthew sought to demonstrate that the new faith was not subversive, by depicting Pilate as relatively innocent and to shift the blame for the persecution of Jesus from Roman to Jewish opponents.

Much study has been concentrated on the legal difficulties in Mark's account of the trial of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Four requirements for trials on capital charges, as laid down in the Mishnah are violated by Mark's account.

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<sup>8</sup> Kirsch, P J - We Christians and Jews, p.47

<sup>9</sup> Who Crucified Jesus?, p.40

<sup>10</sup> Neusner, J - First-Century Judaism in Crisis, p.40

<sup>11</sup> Cohn, H - The Trial and Death of Jesus

Catchpole, D - The Trial of Jesus

Winter, P - On the Trial of Jesus

- (i) Mark indicates that the trial occurred at night (15:1; Mt 26:34), following the gathering at Gethsemane, while the Mishnah required that trials be held and verdicts reached during the day. This was to prevent secret trials.
- (ii) Mark 15:42 indicates that the trial was held on the eve of the Passover, which is strictly forbidden in Jewish law.
- (iii) According to Mark, Jesus was tried and executed on the same day, (15:1, Mt 27:1), a violation of the requirements that a verdict not be given until the following day and that a second session was needed to ratify the guilty decision of the first. This requirement was to protect the accused from unjust and hasty conclusions.
- (iv) According to Mark, the trial was held in the home of the high priest (14:53-54; Mt 26:58), whereas the law required that it be held in the hall of Hewn Stones.<sup>12</sup>

Thus our conclusion is that it is neither historically accurate nor meaningful to say that the Jews killed Jesus. It follows therefore that the events of AD70 - the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people - are not in any way connected with Jewish guilt and God's subsequent punishment of it. Johann Konrad, a religious educator, comes to the same conclusion:

In the sovereign name of Jesus we must clearly and simply say: you have heard that it was said to those of old that the Jews killed Jesus. But I say to you, first it was the Romans who snatched Jesus from the Jews by crucifying him. We must see to it that our children's first contact with the story of the passion is not according to the Gospels but rather in accord with the most plausible historical course of events.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Juel, D - Messiah and Temple, p.59

<sup>13</sup> Lapide, P & Luz, V - Jesus in Two Perspectives, p.79

In connection with a re-evaluation of part of Matthew's theology there is a way of affirming some of his theology that is positive rather than negative toward Judaism. The first issue is Mt 28:19. Just as the Greek Fathers took this verse to mean that the gospel was to be offered to the gentiles only, not to Jews, so we can affirm that in a sense the Christian gospel is for non-Jews, not for Jews.<sup>14</sup> There is no need for evangelistic campaigns to tear Jews from their rich religious tradition. Jewish worship of the One God and acts of obedience to him are authentic responses to the revelation which found literary form in the Torah. A second possible way to escape from Matthew's unrelenting anti-Judaism is provided by his inconsistency in the matter of accountability before God. Matthew is certain that accountability is related to faith that maintains Jesus is the Son of God. Christians who deny Jesus before men will be denied before God (10:32f). On the other hand, Matthew cannot forget that God is a moral God. It is not those who call Jesus "Lord, Lord" who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of the Father in heaven (7:21). Consequently, it is not surprising that the "Great Commission" which concludes Matthew's gospel emphasizes not the first but the second of these two kinds of accountability: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the gentiles, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...." (28:19f). The tension between these two types of accountability is apparent only in unusual circumstances, such as the case of pagans who have never had the opportunity of hearing the gospel. Is it right that they should be condemned for failing to have manifest faith in the Son of God? Matthew's parable of the sheep and goats (25:31-46) deals with this situation very sensitively. Matthew believes that just as there are three kinds of humanity -

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<sup>14</sup> Hare, D & Harrington, D - Make Disciples of All the Gentiles, Mt 28:19, p.367f

Jews, Christians and pagans - so there will be three separate judgments. This passage deals only with the third of these.<sup>15</sup> The pagans are judged simply on an ethical basis: "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (25:40). The love that they had not been able to render to the King they had in fact bestowed on him unknowingly through their love for fellow human beings, because in this way they were indeed disciples of Jesus *incognito*, doing what Jesus commanded. There is here, inconsistently, a limited type of universalism. Could Matthew retain this vision of another fold whose sheep are precious to the King without granting in principle the possibility that Jews too, while refusing to call Jesus "Lord, Lord" nonetheless do the things which are important to him - feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick and caring for the imprisoned - and are consequently to be reckoned among the blessed of the Father?

## B JOHN

As we have already noted, John contains much theological anti-Judaism. Perhaps the most prominent aspect of this theology is simply his use of the term "the Jews." The expression appears only five times in Matthew and Luke, six times in Mark, but 71 times in John - almost always as the epitome of all that is evil and unbelieving. "The Jews" are the archenemies of Jesus and as "children of the devil" (8:44) serve as the dark backdrop to the Christological "Son of God." What Rabbi Kohler said in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* is true: "The Fourth Gospel is the gospel of Christian love and Jewish hate."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.364f

<sup>16</sup> Epp, E - Anti-Semitism and the Popularity of the Fourth Gospel in Christianity, p.49

We must attempt to undermine John's theological anti-Judaism by emphasizing the few positive aspects of the relationship between Jesus and the Jews found in the gospel. This includes some aspects of John's version of Jesus' arrest and trial.

Even though certain aspects of John's trial seem to heighten the blame placed upon the Jews, at some points John is less anti-Jewish than Matthew. Whereas Matthew insists that the charge against Jesus was blasphemy (Mt 26:65), John 11:48 makes it clear that the Jewish authorities were concerned lest Jesus disrupt political relations with Rome. Earlier in the gospel John is quite clear that the Jews were ready to kill Jesus over the issue of his divine sonship (5:18, 10:33-39), however, it is the political concern that dominates the trial. The Jewish authorities plan to kill Jesus lest his growing popularity invites Roman intervention (11:48). In contrast, Matthew 26:3f reports the official decision but omits the political concerns behind it. John portrays the Jewish proceedings that follow the arrest as being relatively unimportant. Apart from the fact that they take place before the High Priest, there is little detail about what happened to Jesus. John's meagre treatment of these proceedings stands out in comparison to Matthew. The latter describes a formal trial and makes clear the charge against Jesus was blasphemy (Mt 26:65), so that the Jewish proceedings tend to overshadow the trial before the Roman governor. Thus Matthew emphasizes that the primary charge against Jesus was a strictly Jewish crime. In John, the opposite has happened. By making the Jewish proceedings quite informal with no mention of the accusations against Jesus, John has featured the importance of the Roman trial in which the charge was a political crime against Rome.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Barrett, C K - The Gospel according to St John, pp.436f

Matthew reports Jesus' arrest as a wholly Jewish affair. Judas betrays Jesus to Jewish authorities (Mt 27:3-10) and that in addition to Judas those responsible for the actual arrest were a crowd from the chief priests, scribes and elders. John makes no mention of Jewish involvement with Judas (6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26-30), he adds that Roman soldiers were present at the arrest. Instead of a crowd mentioned in Matthew (Mt 26:47), John reports that Judas came for Jesus with an escort of soldiers under a centurion, along with some officers from the chief priests and Pharisees (18: 3, 12). Thus, according to John, Jewish authorities were responsible for arresting Jesus, but these authorities had acted under Roman pressure and had carried out the action with a band of Roman soldiers.

According to John 19:16, the Roman governor, Pilate, handed Jesus over to Jewish authorities for crucifixion, but such an act seems unlikely. There is an apparent contradiction between this verse and verses 23, 31, according to which Jesus was crucified by the governor's soldiers. Yet, while John has given the Jewish authorities an unlikely role in the crucifixion, that role would not have been impossible. The position of the Chief Priests at that time was such that Pilate could regard them as his subordinates. Toward the end of the second temple, Jewish high priests were appointed and deposed at will by Roman governors who generally controlled their actions.<sup>18</sup> According to John 19:15 the chief priests declare, "We have no king but Caesar!" These words not only confirm that the chief priests were Roman underlings, but also the political nature of the trial. Thus, as subordinates of a Roman governor, the chief priests could have used Roman soldiers for the crucifixion as well as for the arrest. In writing 19:16, John was less concerned with

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<sup>18</sup> Townsend, J T - The Gospel of John and the Jews, p.78



historical probability than with a desire to continue the tradition of direct Jewish involvement in the death of Jesus.

Ultimately, John agrees with all the gospels that Jesus was charged with claiming to be King of the Jews and that Jewish pressure forced the governor to condemn Jesus, whom he believed to be innocent. In Matthew, for example, it is the Jewish crowd that cries out against Jesus (Mt 26:23f), while in John the Jewish presence at the trial is limited to the chief priests and their officers (19:6). Even though John regularly refers to those demanding Jesus' death as "the Jews" (18:31, 38; 19:7, 12, 14, cf 18:36), the context makes clear that these Jews are merely the priestly delegation (19:6,15). Certainly, John's account of the Roman trial contains nothing so anti-Jewish as Mt 27:25. Still the fact remains that John frequently chose to identify the priestly delegation as "the Jews" and that would lead the casual reader to believe that it was the Jewish people who forced the crucifixion.

On the other hand, even though John appears to blame "the Jews" for much (5:16, 18; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31; 19:7), the designation "Jew" does not always appear in a negative sense. John reports Jesus was a Jew (4:9) and that Jews have a special role in God's plan for salvation (4:22). The gospel also affirms the popularity and the esteem of Jesus among his own people. Many Jews believed in Jesus (2:23; 7:40; 8:30f; 10:42; 12:11, 19), in fact, according to John 11:45-48, Jesus' popularity among the Jews is what led to the decision to kill him. John reports that even some of the Jewish leaders secretly believed in Jesus (12:42; cf 3:1f; 7:50-52), and that after his death two such leaders took his body and gave it a proper Jewish burial

(19:38-42). Besides this, although John generally uses "Jew" with an unfavourable connotation, his occasional use of "Israel" and "Israelite" indicates a favourable bias.<sup>19</sup> The words appear a total of five times. Twice, incipient believers hail Jesus as "King of Israel" (1:49; 12:13), and John the Baptist declares that his mission is for Jesus to be "revealed to Israel" (1:31). Jesus also declares that Nathanael is "truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit" (1:47), and refers to Nicodemus as "the teacher of Israel" (3:10).

As our brief survey indicates, John often appears less anti-Jewish than the other gospels, especially Matthew. Nevertheless, in many respects the gospel lives up to its anti-Jewish reputation. Although John affirms the Jewishness of Jesus, at times John has Jesus address the Jews as an outsider. According to the gospel, the Jews regarded Jesus as both lawbreaker and blasphemer. John even implies that the Jews as a whole were responsible for the crucifixion. He does so by a subtle use of the word "Jew". By freely applying "the Jews" to limited groups within Judaism, he manages to imply that the Jews as a whole were behind Jesus' execution. While John is not quite as anti-Jewish as Matthew in maintaining that the Jewish people deserve God's vengeance (Mt 27:25), nevertheless, John teaches that rejection of Jesus brings condemnation (9:18; 12:48) and that it was the Jews who rejected him.

As we have noted, Matthew and John, while being able to a limited degree, to be interpreted positively in relation to Judaism, are overall anti-Jewish. Some scholars have suggested that the only way to deal with the anti-Judaism of parts of the New Testament is to expurgate any

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<sup>19</sup> Pancaro, S - The Relationship of the Church in the Gospel of St John, p.398

anti-Jewish material. Yet this is simplistic and unrealistic and would probably "bring with it as many problems as it tried to solve".<sup>20</sup> Eldon Epp elaborates:

Are the anti-Jewish portions to be excised from the Fourth Gospel? Such a solution could succeed no better than the abortive attempt by the Christian heretic, Marcion, who was motivated by anti-Jewish prejudices, to eliminate ... all pro-Jewish portions from the gospel of Luke and the ten letters of Paul.<sup>21</sup>

There is much in the scripture which is repugnant to modern believers, but it would be a tragic mistake to attempt to solve the problem by radical surgery. Religious literature that belongs to the constitutive era of a religious community is to be preserved in its wholeness and interpreted anew for each succeeding age. Richard Lowry puts this idea very well:

The anti-Semitism of the New Testament is probably like the weather: one does not have the option of changing it, only of making the best of it. In seeking realistic solutions, one must look not so much to what is once and for all said in the New Testament, as to how what is said is understood.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the possible solution to overcoming the anti-Judaism of Matthew and John is the reinterpretive principle that the concrete injunction is annulled by the authority of the over-arching principle. For example, demeaning statements concerning women and slaves are not to be expunged. They must be recognized for what they were: temporally conditioned statements made by men who were moved by the Spirit of God but who were limited by the historical realities of their time. The statement of 1 Timothy 2:12 "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent," must be interpreted in the light of texts more fundamental to Christian anthropology, such as Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

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<sup>20</sup> Lowry R - The Rejected-Suitor Syndrome, p.231

<sup>21</sup> Anti-Semitism & the Popularity of the Fourth Gospel in Christianity, p.55

<sup>22</sup> Lowry, R - The Rejected-Suitor Syndrome, p.231

By this process of subordinating one text to the authority of another, innumerable biblical texts have been reinterpreted in the Christian tradition when the pressure of an uneasy conscience has caused believers to raise questions concerning the normative value of the literal words of scripture. Thus the anti-Judaism of Matthew and John can be overcome by the optimism of Paul. Paul's statements like Romans 11:1 "I say then has God cast away His people? Certainly not!" must be taken as the over-arching principle of the attitude of the church to the synagogue. One proof text shall not suffice, though, we must show that overall, Paul had a very positive attitude towards Judaism. This is now our task.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TEACHING OF PAUL

#### I : INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul has, perhaps even more than Jesus of Nazareth, been a subject of bitter confrontation between Christians and Jews. Often scholars rescue Jesus from functioning as the great divide between church and synagogue, only to appoint Paul to perform that function. Markus Barth puts it plainly:

The time is over in which Jewish scholars sought to ward off claims and attacks of Christian missionaries by defaming or ridiculing the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But signs of painful surprise, if not regret, resentment, or outright hostility, are still found in Jewish studies of Paul's theology.<sup>1</sup>

This view is expressed by many Jewish scholars - Martin Buber, Joseph Klausner, Sholem Asch, H J Schoeps - whose attitudes toward Jesus and Paul can be summarised in these words:

Jesus of Nazareth was all right, he represented the best in Judaism, and Jews can learn many things from him. But when Paul of Tarsus became an apostle, there was trouble. It was his teaching and his work that separated the church and the synagogue in that fateful way which has led to ever new outbreaks of anti-Semitism among the nations.<sup>2</sup>

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SEE FULL DETAILS IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

<sup>1</sup> Was Paul an Anti-Semite? p.78

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

From a Jewish perspective, Paul was an apostate. He willingly rejected his Jewish inheritance for Christianity and counselled other Jews likewise. He hoped that all Jews would ultimately lose their Jewish identity and become Christians.<sup>3</sup>

For Christians, Paul is a hero because he showed the error of Jewish claims of superiority. Judaism, with its observance of the Law, was actually inferior to Gentile Christianity with its faith in Christ. Christians believe Paul renounced Judaism since he was dissatisfied with a legalist religion and thus sought relief in Christ. Paul is almost unanimously seen by Christians as holding that Christ, as the end of the law, abrogates the law as a way of salvation, leaving Jews outside the saved community.

Jews counter that Paul has fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the Law as presented in the Hebrew Bible, in post-biblical Judaism, and in the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

Until recently, Christian scholarship, like Bornkamm,<sup>4</sup> Bultmann,<sup>5</sup> and Käsemann held uncritically the view that first century Judaism was a legalistic religion. Typical is Käsemann's aphorism, "the real opponent of the Apostle Paul is the pious Jew".<sup>6</sup> Despite G F Moore's warning in 1921 that "Christian interest in Jewish literature has always been apologetic or polemic rather than historical"<sup>7</sup> his words appear to have gone unheeded. Isaac's protest against the distorted image of early Judaism and its concept of the Law in the

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<sup>3</sup> Swidler, L; Eron, L J; Sloyan, G; Dean, L - Bursting the Bonds? A Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Jesus and Paul, page 129

<sup>4</sup> Jesus of Nazareth, p.40

<sup>5</sup> Theology of the New Testament, Vol.1, p.11

<sup>6</sup> New Testament Questions of Today, p.184

<sup>7</sup> Christian Writers on Judaism, p.197

Christian tradition also appears to have been largely without effect.<sup>8</sup> This tradition of scholarship on early Judaism and its insistence that Jewish piety of the day was one of legalistic works-righteousness is incomprehensible unless we pre-suppose that it has been shaped by a systematic anti-Judaism. This has been on two levels: first, by taking the image of Judaism in early Christian writings at face value and failing to recognize the anti-Judaism behind that image, and, second, by perpetuating the anti-Judaism of later Christianity which required a negative image of Judaism for its own theological legitimacy. Apart from the general theological usefulness of the view that Judaism had degenerated to such a state that it deserved to be replaced by the "true Israel", it has been pointed out that Protestant scholarship in particular engaged in a covert polemic against Roman Catholicism by projecting distasteful aspects of Catholic belief and practice on to Judaism and attacking it in that guise.<sup>9</sup> This process appears to be at work in specifically Lutheran scholarship.<sup>10</sup> For when Luther's antithesis between Law and Gospel is applied to the relationship between the church and synagogue, the result is an assortment of falsities in which the "facts" of history disappear altogether behind a cloud of religious polemic.<sup>11</sup> Krister Stendahl describes the problem as follows:

According to ... this habit-forming structure of theological thinking, Jewish attitudes and Jewish piety are by definition the example of the wrong attitude towards God .... This whole system of thinking ... treats Jewish piety as the black background that makes Christian piety the more shining. In such a state of affairs, it is hard to engender respect for Judaism and the Jews. And the theological system requires the retention of such an understanding of Judaism, whether true or not.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Teaching of Contempt, p.107

<sup>9</sup> Sanders, E P - Paul and Palestinian Judaism, p.52

<sup>10</sup> Stendahl, K - Paul among Jews and Gentiles, p.85

<sup>11</sup> Gager, J G - The Origins of Anti-Semitism, p.33

<sup>12</sup> Meanings, p.222

Yet E P Sanders marked a watershed in Pauline studies in this regard, for he suggested in his book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, that the relevant sources concerning Jewish self-understanding reveal instead a "pattern of religion" that he terms "covenantal normism."<sup>13</sup>

This pattern attributes salvation to God's gracious election of Israel, from its covenant status and upholds obedience to the law as necessary not to gain, but to maintain this covenant status. Scholars had begun to realize that insofar as the Pauline interpreter finds it necessary to speak about Judaism, what is said must be based exclusively on Jewish sources and understood as far as possible from the perspective of those sources. The scholarly maxim underlying this injunction is *ad fontes* - back to the original sources, and the biblical commandment which applies is the prohibition not to bear false witness against one's neighbour.

The result of applying the *ad fontes* principle to Pauline studies yielded new insights. It is Paul's abrogation of the law which most disturbs those who know something of the concept of the law in Jewish thought. Yet Paul's attack on the law disturbs them less than his ignorance, for anyone who understands Judaism, Paul's invective is not merely unfair, it misses the mark completely. Judaism never speaks of the Law as the means to salvation, rather the Law, "which is your life" (Deut. 32:47) is that salvation. While the ethical seriousness of Judaism is heightened because of its belief that the Law expresses God's will for man's good, it cannot be called a legalist religion. Faith and works are never seen as opposites, for each would be meaningless without the other. The Law is not felt to be



burdensome and the characteristic phrase is "the joy of the commandments." As the Jewish saying expresses it:

The son who serves his father serves him with joy, saying, 'Even if I do not always succeed (in obeying the commandments), yet, as a loving father, he will not be angry with me,' while the Gentile slave is always afraid lest he may commit some fault and therefore serves God in a condition of anxiety and confusion.<sup>14</sup>

The Law in Judaism as the revelation of God came to mean God in his knowability, in his presence, in his electing will, in his covenant. Failure to understand the gracious, covenantal aspect of the law has been one of the major reasons for Christian misconceptions of the "law" within Judaism. As EP Sanders says: "salvation comes by membership in the covenant, while obedience to the commandments preserves one's place in the covenant."<sup>15</sup> Thus, far from being an inducement to sin or the curse of condemnation, the Law is God's gracious means of helping people to conquer their "evil impulse".<sup>16</sup> There is no indication that Paul is aware that many of the laws of Judaism concern the means of atonement, which presuppose human sin but also proclaim divine forgiveness. It is very significant that the concept of repentance, so central not only to Judaism but also to the teaching of Jesus, never occurs in Paul.<sup>17</sup> As G F Moore says:

How a Jew of Paul's antecedents could ignore, and by implication deny, the great prophetic doctrine of repentance, which, individualized and interiorized, was a cardinal doctrine of Judaism, namely, that God, out of love, freely forgives the sincerely penitent sinner and restores him to his favour - that seems from the Jewish point of view inexplicable.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tanihuma, Noach, 19 - Gaston, L - Paul and the Torah, p.69

<sup>15</sup> The Covenant as a Soteriological Category and the Nature of Salvation in Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism, p.15

<sup>16</sup> Gaston, L - Paul and the Torah, p.51

<sup>17</sup> Stendahl, K - Paul among Jews & Gentiles, p.23

<sup>18</sup> Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, Vol.III; p.151

We face an unpleasant alternative : either Paul correctly understood Judaism in his time as a legalistic form of works righteousness or he never did understand the nature and purpose of the Law in Judaism. More likely, however, is that neither of these alternatives is correct. The problem lies rather with the interpreters of Paul. What is needed is a different starting point. For if we assume that Paul understood "covenantal normism" and that he is to be interpreted within the context of early Judaism rather than that the Christian concept of Judaism is to be derived from what Paul denies, then it may well be that Paul is dealing with a different set of problems and answering a different set of questions. *A priori*, one would not expect the Apostle to the Gentiles to be engaged in a dialogue with Judaism but rather with Gentile Christians, explaining how such central concepts as the Law relate to them.

As we have already noted, supercessionism, in the modern period church history, has been set within the framework of key reformation concepts. Against the background of Luther's struggles with "pangs of conscience" and a works-orientated Roman Catholicism, this approach placed the justification of the individual at the centre of Paul's theology. Furthermore, this idea is clearly underpinned by the notion that Paul's treatment of the Law and justification by works is aimed at Jews and Judaism rather than at Christians. Yet we cannot be sure that Paul's theology can so easily be summarized under the rubric of "justification of the ungodly." Paul's arguments concerning justification by faith have not grown out of his "struggle with the Judaistic interpretation of the Law,"<sup>19</sup> and are not "a fighting doctrine, directed at Judaism."<sup>20</sup> Its place and function, especially in Romans, is not primarily polemic, but apologetic as he defends the right of Gentile converts to be full

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<sup>19</sup> Käsemann, E - Perspectives on Paul, p.60

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.70, 71

members of the people of God. When he uses the argument "justification by faith" in Galatians, he defends the rights of his Gentile converts against the practice of "Judaizing," ie., of Gentiles submitting to circumcision and food laws. Supercessionism has always maintained that Paul intended his argument about justification to answer the question: How am I to find a gracious God? Yet could it be that Paul's question was: How am I, to understand the place of the Gentiles in the covenants of God and how am I to defend the rights of the Gentiles to participation in God's promises? As Gaston points out, "It is remarkable that in the endless discussions of Paul's understanding of the Law, few have asked what a first century Jew would have thought of the Law as it related to Gentiles!"<sup>21</sup>

It is hermeneutical principle that in the interpretation of texts, the end depends on the beginning. If one begins with the assumption that Paul was writing to Christian Gentiles, not Jews, then one will end with a radically different interpretation of Paul's attitude towards Judaism. Furthermore, one might be bold enough to say that perhaps Paul said nothing against the Law and Israel but bypassed them as simply irrelevant to his gospel. For, if Paul wrote to Gentile Christians dealing with Gentile-Christian disputes, foremost among which was the right of gentiles as gentiles, without embracing the Law of Israel, to have full residentship of the people of God, one could assert this.<sup>22</sup>

The immediate context of Paul's letters points overwhelmingly to his preoccupation with the status of Gentiles in terms of the law. Paul's self-presentation in Galatians, following the meeting in Jerusalem, is absolutely crucial for understanding him. For he clearly presents

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<sup>21</sup> Gaston, L - Paul and the Torah: p.56

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

himself as the apostle to the Gentiles: "When they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to uncircumcised ... they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles..." (2:7-9). Paul's gospel was not merely directed at Gentiles but was principally about Gentiles: "Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles..." (Gal. 3:8). This is where our point about beginnings is relevant, for it is essential to recognize that Paul's letters were written to congregations overwhelmingly made up of Gentiles.<sup>23</sup> Any interpretation that loses sight of this context is bound to go astray. We must now begin to expand our idea that Paul's sole concern is to defend the status of his Gentile converts as the sons of Abraham without first becoming Jews. The book of Romans will make up the mainstay of our study, since the book embodies Paul's fullest treatment of the church and Israel.

The traditional supercessionist understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Law has always been disconcerted by Pauline texts like Rom 2:25 "Circumcision is indeed of value if you obey the law"; Rom 3:1-2 "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way"; 3:31 "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means!" But to be disconcerted is not to be confounded. These texts are simply ignored, or the solution lies in choosing not to begin with them, but to begin instead with texts that can be read as speaking of the abrogation of the Law and thus the demise of Israel, for example, Rom 10:4 "Christ is the end of the Law...." The result is to move from specific texts to theological generalisations where the interest is to maintain confessional

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<sup>23</sup> See: Rom 1:5f, 1:13; 6:19; 11:13,28; 15:15f; Gal 4:8; 1 Cor 12:2; Phil 3:2f; 1 Thess 1:9

standards rather than exegetical integrity. We shall begin with these texts and examine other texts in Romans in the light of them.

One might say that the key word for understanding Romans is *pars*, "all" or "every". The specific occasion of Paul's writing to the Romans is clear : he wants to establish a partnership with Greek Christians to begin to carry the gospel to the barbarians -specifically, he wants Roman moral and financial backing for his forthcoming mission to Spain (15:22-29). He writes not to convert them or to correct a false gospel (15:14) but to encourage them and to remind them of their equal status in the people of God with Israel. The election of the church does not mean the rejection of Israel (Chap.9-11); it does mean the inclusion of all Gentiles, Spaniards as well as Romans. Thus the theoretical theme of the epistle, that God's righteousness is his power for salvation for the Jew of course, but also for the Greek (1:16-17), is stated in support of the practical thrust that this gospel is for the Greek of course, but also for the barbarian (1:14-15).

We must also be careful not to try to force the epistle into the category of a systematic treatise. Firstly, because Paul is not a dogmatic theologian, writing timeless truths about God and the world. He is rather a pastoral theologian, saying what he thinks needs to be said in a very concrete missionary situation. J C Becker elaborates:

Paul is a hermeneutic theologian rather than a systematic theologian. Paul must be viewed primarily as an interpreter of the early Christian tradition and not as a builder of Christian doctrine. Although the tendency persists to view Romans as a dogmatics in outline, or as a version of a *compendium doctrinae Christianae* (Melanchthon), Romans is actually a profoundly occasional letter.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Faithfulness of God & the Priority of Israel in Paul's letter to the Romans: pp.10 & 11

Secondly, because of Paul's eschatological orientation. The fact that he expected Christ's coming in the proximate future, was hardly conducive to systematic reflection or formulation.<sup>25</sup> Thus we must not blame Paul if at times he appears to be inconsistent (C H Dodd blames Paul for inconsistency in his commentary),<sup>26</sup> there are bound to be a few loose ends in his thinking.

## **II : HAS THE LAW BEEN SUPERSEDED BY CHRIST**

### **A ROMANS 2-3**

Paul's first comment on the continued validity of the Law focuses on circumcision. Apart from the statement, circumcision is profitable : "circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision." (2:25), Paul insists that the validity of circumcision and observance of the Law are intertwined. This is the core of Chapter 2, that doing the Law is superior to hearing it; Jews who hear the Law but fail to do it give up any privilege. This is the first salvo in Paul's assault on Jewish boasting. The substance of Paul's complaint regarding Jewish boasting appears most plainly in Rom. 2:17-24 "You call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast of your relation to God ... You who boast in the Law!" What Paul objects to here is neither the Law itself, nor the claim that it expresses God's righteousness, nor, as customarily asserted, that for Jews justification consisted of "doing the law." Rather, the only revolutionary element in his teaching will be that Christ now offers Gentiles, what Jews always claimed to be possible only through the Law, ie., righteousness and knowledge of God. This is Paul's polemic

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<sup>25</sup> Richardson, P - Israel in the Apostolic Church; pp.102-111

<sup>26</sup> The Epistle of Paul to the Romans; pp.56; 179

against Judaism. Not that the Law is of no use for Jews, but that the Law's usefulness has been duplicated for Gentiles through Christ. Therefore, the Law remains valid if observance occurs and now righteous Gentiles have been placed on an equal footing with Jews. (2:13-15)<sup>27</sup>

Paul then proceeds to clear away misunderstanding of his ideas in 3:1 & 2. Aware of the possibility that his writings may be taken as denying the "value" of circumcision, he asserts the contrary, "Then what has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way...." Then in 3:3-8, addressing once again the issue of disobedient Jews, he says that their faithlessness in no way nullifies the faithfulness of God.

What follows in 3:9-26 is the crucial Pauline text on the continued validity of the Law. Supercessionism maintains that in verses 21-26 Paul replaces Law with Christ as the manifestation of God's righteousness and that "faith in Christ" becomes the only basis for justification. As Käsemann comments on this passage, "The obedience of faith abrogates the law as a mediator of salvation, sees through the perversion of understanding it as a principle of achievement...."<sup>28</sup> Yet it may be possible to read these verses as speaking not of the exclusion of Jews, but rather the inclusion of Gentiles.<sup>29</sup>

The main theme of 3:9-26 corresponds to the issue of Jewish boasting first introduced in 2:17. Paul's attack comes in 3:9a "What then are we Jews any better off?" Yet the answer

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<sup>27</sup> Gager, J G - The Origins of Anti-Semitism; p.214

<sup>28</sup> Käsemann, E - Commentary on Romans; p.93

<sup>29</sup> Howard, G - Rom. 3:21-31 & the Inclusion of the Gentiles; p.233

in 3:9b that Jews are not better off in no way invalidates the Law, but places Gentiles and Jews on the same level and prepares the way for the claim that God's righteousness for Gentiles has now been made manifest apart from the Law and is therefore no longer Israel's exclusive privilege (3:21). The culmination of the passage in 3:21 maintains that God's righteousness has been "manifest apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God, through the faith of Jesus Christ, for all who believe." Supercessionism holds that the "all" here and again in verse 23 includes both Jews and Gentiles. Thus "all" must rely on "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:25) for "all have sinned" (3:23). Yet we must question whether Paul is thinking here of Jews in these critically important verses 21-26. The transition to a primary focus on Gentiles comes earlier in verses 19-20. The reason we can claim this so boldly is because of the phrases "under the law" v19 and "works of the law" v20. Both these phrases occur "in contexts where the imposition of some legal elements upon the Gentiles is discussed."<sup>30</sup> Supercessionism traditionally maintains Paul is referring to a legalist Judaism in these phrases. Yet the doing of certain works in order to win God's favour and be counted righteous arose as a Gentile and not as a Jewish problem. Salvation and grace were all under the covenant of Israel, who maintained the Law, but Gentiles not under the covenant had to establish their righteousness by the performance of certain works, compounded by uncertainty as to what these works should be.<sup>31</sup> Thus, for Gentiles, who do not have the law as covenant, the Law as law functions in an exclusively negative way to condemn. Markus Barth has shown that the phrase "works of the law", which is not found in any Jewish texts, refers to the adoption of selected Jewish practices on the part of Gentiles and their attempt to

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<sup>30</sup> Barth, M; Ephesians; p.246

<sup>31</sup> Gaston, L - Paul and the Torah; p.48



impose them upon others as a means of self-justification.<sup>32</sup> While Lloyd Gaston maintains that the phrase "under the law, is found in no Jewish writing in relation to the law, but seems to have been used by Paul to identify the Gentile situation."<sup>33</sup> Thus the peculiar Gentile problem was one of Judaizing. Gentile Judaizers who wanted to impose on themselves and others selected Jewish practices in order to live according to the Jewish way of life, at least in part. That there were such Gentile Judaizers in the early church context and that their message was a temptation for the church is shown by Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, "those who say they are Jews and are not", and two passages in the writings of the church father Ignatius: "It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to Judaize", and "But if anyone interprets Judaism to you do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from the circumcised than Judaism from the uncircumcised."<sup>34</sup> Recognition of the existence of such legalistic Gentile Judaizers is a very important part of the background for understanding Paul's polemic.

Thus Paul's concern is to argue in verses 19; 20; 21 that Gentiles need no longer do certain "works of the Law" for the "righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ." Israel has always had cultic means of expiation, but now God has presented Christ Jesus as such a means for the Gentiles, apart from or alongside his covenant with Israel (v25).

A further argument toward the idea that these verses are addressed to Gentiles comes by G F Howard's exegesis of these verses. He believes the phrase "since he has passed over former sin" in 3:25 refers specifically to the catalogue of Gentile aims in 1:18-28. God shows his

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<sup>32</sup> Ephesians; p.244-248

<sup>33</sup> Paul and the Torah; p.62

<sup>34</sup> Magnesians 10:3; Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol 1; p.63

righteousness in no longer counting these sins against the Gentiles. Thus is it these Gentiles who have faith in Jesus who God now justifies. They are also those among whom "there is no distinction" (3:22b), for "they have all sinned..." (3:23).<sup>35</sup> Yet even if we persist with the supercessionist view that "all" includes Jews and Gentiles and that both are justified by faith, we must strongly resist any understanding which maintains that the law is thereby invalidated. Rather faith determines not merely the new relationship of Gentiles to God through Christ but also from the beginning, the relationship of Jews to God through Law. This reading of 3:23 stresses the full continuity between Chapter 3 and Paul's continuing argument against Jewish boasting. The nature of the polemic throughout is not the Law has passed away as a result of boasting, rather that the proper and original attitude of faith in the Law as a covenant must be restored by Jews. (3:27).

What follows in 3:27-31 provides perhaps the best possible clue to the overall thrust of the discussion in 3:9-26. Paul's polemic throughout has been Jewish boasting. He attacks this boasting not by saying the Law has passed away (3:31) or by rejecting Jews, rather he puts Gentiles and Jews on the same level. That is why Jews can no longer boast. This is clear in 3:29 "Is God the God of Jews only?" Once again not the exclusion of the Jews, but the inclusion of the Gentiles. Paul's problem with Israel is its claim to exclusive access to God's righteousness and thus to the privileges that flow from it. As he says in 9:4-5 the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, the promises and the patriarchs. In fact, the Jewish claim to exclusivity never meant that Gentiles were denied access to these privileges. Gentiles could become Jewish proselytes, but Gentiles as Gentiles stood outside

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<sup>35</sup>

Romans 3:21-31 and the Inclusion of the Gentiles; pp 223-233

the covenant of Israel and its privileges.<sup>36</sup> Thus the boasting which is now excluded (3:27) is not "as to righteousness in the law blameless." (Phil 3:6) ie., individual Jews seeking to establish their own righteousness by legalistically following the Law, but rather the attitude expressed by the Jewish prayer, "Thou didst choose the seed of Abraham to the exclusion of all the Gentiles"<sup>37</sup> ie., Jewish claims to collective exclusivity for Israel. Paul's response to the problem of boasting is to state that Gentiles are no longer justified by "works of law" (3:28) ie., by observing elements of the Mosaic commandments, but rather Gentiles and Jews stand as equals before God on the basis of their faith (3:22, 26). For Gentiles this faith has Christ as its focus, for Jews, as Paul argued in 2:1-29, faith means doing the Law rather than merely having it. Paul thus speaks of two separate groups whom God will justify on the basis of their respective faith: the circumcised and uncircumcised (3:30). Could it be that Paul is moving close to a two-covenant theology? God has shown his righteousness in a new act, apart from the Sinai covenant but not contradictory to it (3:21). This is perhaps why Paul so seldom connected covenant with law, for a new type of theological vocabulary was necessary when he spoke of the new relationship of Gentiles with God. We can also see why he never spoke of repentance, for that meant turning back to the God of the Jewish covenant and Paul was concerned about Gentiles turning to him for the first time!

## B ROMANS 4

The main thrust is once again boasting. Is it now true that the ground of Israel's special position (9:4-5) and thus of its boasting lies in the fact that God's guaranteed that position in

<sup>36</sup> Gager, J G - The Origins of Anti-Semitism, p.248

<sup>37</sup> Pss. Sol 9:9 - Gaston, L - The Inclusion of Gentiles, p.122

his promise to Abraham? Paul's answer is that Abraham is the father equally of circumcised and uncircumcised (4:11-12). Of the Jews because he is the first patriarch and because he received circumcision as the prime sign of the covenant. Of Gentiles, because Paul argues that since God proclaimed Abraham to be justified before he was circumcised, because of his faith, he became the prototype of all who believe without circumcision, "apart from works" (4:6). Thus Paul uses Abraham to demonstrate the equality of Jews and Gentiles. Thus the blessing of David regarding the forgiveness of sins is said to Gentiles, eg., 4:5, 6, 9, as well as Jews. The promise came to Abraham before his circumcision, "not through the law" (4:13), so that it might "rest on grace" (4:16) and thus apply "not only to the adherents of the Law but also to those who share in the faith of Abraham" (4:16). Thus, the exposition of Gen 15:6 "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" in verse 3 enables Paul to strengthen his earlier claim in 3:27-31 that the principle of faith applies not just to Gentiles, whose justification is through Christ, but also to Jews, whose justification is through law. In this sense, the use of Abraham also confirms Paul's position that he does not replace the Law by faith (3:31). Furthermore, Paul interprets Abraham's status as "the father of many nations" (Gen 17:5) as a reference to future events, specifically, the inclusion of the Gentiles within the community of the covenant (4:17, 23-25). Paul is convinced that the incorporation of the Gentiles has been prophesied. He has said it in 3:21 "although the law and the prophets bear witness to it" and he will say it again in 15:8-12:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise thee among the Gentiles and sing to thy name',<sup>38</sup> and again it is said, 'Rejoice O Gentiles, with his people',<sup>39</sup> and again, 'Praise the

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<sup>38</sup> Ps 18:49; 2 Sam 22:50

<sup>39</sup> Deut 32:43

Lord, all Gentiles, and, let all the peoples praise him';<sup>40</sup> and further Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope'.<sup>41</sup>

Certainly there is the idea that Isa.51:1-8 lies behind this section of Romans 4, in spite of the fact that it is not explicitly cited.<sup>42</sup> Isa.51:1-8 addresses those "who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord" and urges them "to look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who love you." (51:2). Then in 51:4-6 the coming of salvation of God is previewed:<sup>43</sup>

Listen to me my people, and give ear to me you Kings. For Law goes not from me and my justice as a light to the Gentiles. My righteousness draws near speedily and my salvation shall go forth and the Gentiles rely on my arm....

Here we clearly see a connection between God's righteousness, the promise to Abraham and the salvation of the Gentiles. Paul presupposes throughout his arguments that Israel's election stands, but he sees that as a result of Abraham's faithfulness he receives the promise of God's righteousness. This promise is fulfilled in the salvation of Gentiles through Christ. They have been included because God promised Abraham he would do so.

## C ROMANS 7

Few texts in the scripture have been thoroughly and persistently misinterpreted more than Paul's seemingly autobiographical reflection on the Law and sin in Romans 7.<sup>44</sup> Here Paul is not contesting the Law's validity or referring to his own pre-conversion experience of frustration and anguish, prompted by his inability to observe it faithfully. Rather Paul is

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<sup>40</sup> Ps 117:1

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 11:1

<sup>42</sup> Gaston, L - Abraham and the Righteousness of God; p.52

<sup>43</sup> This translation is based on the Greek text of the Septuagint by Gaston. *ibid*

<sup>44</sup> Stendahl, K - Paul among Jews & Gentiles; p.86

involved in an interpretation of the Law, a defence of the holiness and goodness of the Law.<sup>45</sup> For example, he raises and answers a series of rhetorical questions. "In 7:7, he asks, "What shall we say? That the law is sin?" and responds, "By no means! In 7:13, "Did that which is good then, bring death to me? By no means!" "The law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good." (7:12). Far from attacking the Law, Paul defends it against the charge that it is responsible for sin and disobedience in the world. He does so by driving a wedge between sin and the Law. He maintains that sin, operating as an independent body, makes use of the commandments to awaken fleshly desires (7:7,8). He had mentioned this idea earlier in 3:20 and 4:15 and developed it further in 5:12-21. Furthermore, another reason for maintaining that Paul is not talking about his failure to uphold the Law, is that when he addresses his pre-conversion directly, he has no sense of doubt or frustration. No, as Stendahl maintains, Paul has what he calls a "robust conscience".<sup>46</sup> (For example, Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 1:12; 2 Cor 5:10; Phil 3.)

Did Paul's so-called conversion from Judaism to the church, mean for him personally a "gain", a liberation from the law, or a new hope of salvation? He does not say so. There is no indication that advancing "in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers." (Gal 1:4) was a bad thing to do. To be "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee... as to righteousness under the law blameless" (Phil 3:5-6) is said by Paul to be a "gain" (3:7) and to give that up a distinct loss

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.92

<sup>46</sup> Ibid; p.80

(3:7, 8). What he regrets about his past is not his "Judaism" but his persecution of the church (Phil 3:6; Gal 1:13; 1Cor 15:9). As Stendahl says:

The Sin with capital S in Paul's past was that he had persecuted the Church of God. This climax of his dedicated obedience to his Jewish faith (Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6) was the shameful deed which made him least worthy of apostleship (1 Cor 15:9).<sup>47</sup>

But apart from that, his "gains" were real "gains", which he deliberately gave up -

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Phil 3:8-10)

It seems that it is possible to have a status of righteousness from either of two sources, from the law - in the sense of covenant, or from faith in Christ. Paul once had the former (cf. v6) and has shifted to the latter. He does not say that he wishes other Jews to do the same. Knowing Jesus as Lord he says is superior (v 8), but he does not deny at all the validity of life in the Law.

The problem of Gentiles before Christ as Paul says in Gal 3:10 is that any who fail to uphold the entire Law fall under a curse of death (5:12-14; 20-21; 7:5). As descendants of Adam, they are vulnerable to the power of sin.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the dilemma described in 7:15-23 "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do want is what I do" (v 19) is uniquely that of Gentiles. Unlike Jews, they had always been without refuge. Now Christ has done for them what the Law could never do. The Gentile counterpart to living in the covenant community

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid; p.89

<sup>48</sup> Gaston shows in his study that the early chapters of Romans are dominated by a view of Gentiles as descendants of Adam and thus subject to his sinfulness. Paul and the Torah: p.64

of the Law is being "in Christ" (8:1). In line with this, it follows that the exhortations in the remainder of Chap 8, which are based on the contrast between flesh and spirit, are directed to a Gentile audience, for it is Gentiles who are associated with sins of the flesh (cf Rom 12:24-27). The statement of 6:15 "We are not under the law, but under grace" has already established Gentiles as the primary focus of these chapters. As we have already said, the tell-tale phrase "under the law" is virtually a tag for Gentiles.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, we must admit that our interpretation depends on ascertaining the referents of personal pronouns in this chapter. Since Chap 7 is not autobiographical, the first person pronoun here does not refer to Paul.<sup>50</sup> As in Galatians, Paul regularly uses the first person plural pronoun in contexts where it is obvious that he means Gentiles and himself, for example, Gal 3:14 "that in Christ the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." With this highly distinctive use of pronouns, Paul identifies himself totally with his Gentile readers and includes himself in their company.

## D ROMANS 9-11

Among proponents of supercessionist theology, Rom 9-11 has always been seen as a type of digression from Paul's fundamental speculation on justification by faith. Romans 1-8 is considered to be the systematic universal core of Romans, whereas Romans 9-11 is relegated

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<sup>49</sup> See footnote (33)

<sup>50</sup> Stendahl, K - Paul among Jews & Gentiles: p.92



to a Pauline afterthought, too particular and awkward to be awarded any theological weight.

Bultmann<sup>51</sup> Dodd<sup>52</sup> both essentially concur in their own way with F W Beare's judgement:

We have left out of consideration three chapters (9-11) of this letter, chiefly because they do not form an integral part of the main argument. They are a kind of supplement in which Paul struggles with the problem of the failure of his own nation. We cannot feel that the apostle is at his best here, and we are inclined to ask if he has not got himself into inextricable (and needless) difficulties by attempting to salvage some remnant of racial privilege for the historic Israel - Israel 'according to the flesh' - in despite of his own fundamental position that all men are in the same position before God.<sup>53</sup>

Yet it is possible to argue as Krister Stendahl has, that Romans 9-11 is no digression but rather the climax of the whole letter.<sup>54</sup> For if their fundamental argument is that God has not rejected his people, then these chapters, far from being an appendage, are consistent with the preceding chapters.

The particular question answered in these chapters is not "Since we are justified by faith, what happens to Israel?" as supercessionism has preposed, rather "Given the faithfulness of God's righteousness, how do we understand Israel's refusal to recognize and accept the continuity between God's promise to Abraham and his act of redemption in Christ." As in the rest of the letter, the main theme of Chapters 9-11 is the unshakeable character of God's faithfulness expressed in the central premise: "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable"(11:1). Although the actual language is different in Chapters 9-11, Paul

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<sup>51</sup> Theology of the New Testament, Vol 2: p.132

<sup>52</sup> The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, p.148-149

<sup>53</sup> St Paul & His Letters: p.103-104

<sup>54</sup> Paul among Jews & Gentiles: p.4

attempts to expand the question raised earlier in 3:3 "What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!"

This does not deny that Paul expresses great anguish and bewilderment at his brothers' resistance to his gospel or that he expresses this in the claim that the Jews have thereby failed to achieve righteousness (9:30; 11:9), that they have stumbled (9:32). Yet he never speaks of Israel as rejected by God, or the demise of the Law, or Christians as assuming Israel's place. To the contrary, he explicitly denies each one of these possibilities.

We must pause for a moment to ask if Paul's central theme is contradicted by Rom 10:4 "Christ is the *Τελος* of the law so that everyone who believes may have justification." Traditionally *Τελος* has been translated "end" or "termination" or as "fulfilled" and therefore "termination."<sup>55</sup> Frequently, the first half of the verse is read in isolation not only from the second half of the verse, but also from the rest of Chapter 10. Only by reading 10:4 out of context is it possible to hear it as announcing the abrogation of the Law. G E Howard has shown that by paying attention to the full text of Chapter 10 it is possible to understand it as being "dominated by the theme of the inclusion of the gentiles".<sup>56</sup> In conjunction with Howard's proposal, it is possible to translate *Τελος* as goal or aim.<sup>57</sup> Thus Christ is the goal of the law in two ways. Firstly, because from the very beginning God's righteousness and the Law pointed to the ultimate redemption of the Gentiles (Chapters 3 & 4) and, secondly, because faith was the proper response to the covenant, from the beginning for Jews and in

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<sup>55</sup> Meyer, P W - Romans 10:4 and the "End" of the Law; p.59-78

<sup>56</sup> Christ the End of the Law: The Meaning of Romans 10:4ff; p.336

<sup>57</sup> Moo, D - Paul & the Law in the Last Ten Years; p.302

the present for Gentiles (Chapters 3 & 4). In 10:5-13, 18-20, Paul attempts to prove his argument by quoting a string of proof texts, all pointing to the inclusion of the Gentiles, as opposed to the position of the Jewish community who insisted on their collective claim to righteousness to the exclusion of the Gentiles as a group. This is the meaning of 10:3, not that individual Jews sought to establish their own righteousness before God by works. With that clear, Paul then turns to the Gentiles, and addresses them in terms of their faith, 10:9 "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord ... you will be saved", whose contents Paul insists are to be found in scripture. At the end of this section, he goes back to familiar themes of faith (10:10-11) and the unity of God, 10:12, "There is no distinction between Greek and Jew. The same Lord is Lord of all...." in order to establish once again that Gentiles stand on an equal footing with Jews.

Yet we cannot and must not ignore Paul's dispute with Israel, the nature and consequences of which have been subject to continuous misconception.

As we have already noted, Paul's point of contention with Israel is its claim to have sole access to God's righteousness and the privileges that flow from it. This Jewish boasting did not rest, as supersessionism has maintained, on the assertion that individual Jews sought to establish their own righteousness, but rather on the issue of collective exclusivity for Israel. Thus the phrase "based on works"(9:32) cannot mean Paul attributes a notion of works righteousness to Israel, rather, since he has been discussing Gentiles all along, the phrase "based on works" is to be seen as a compressed reference to Paul's underlying rejection of the Jewish insistence that Gentiles must still enter the covenant community through

obedience to the commandments of Moses. Thus Jews have failed to understand the redemption of Gentiles in Christ as the expression of God's righteousness, a righteousness revealed as a promise to Abraham and as fulfilment in Christ. It is over this "righteousness" that Israel has "stumbled". Israel has not arrived at righteousness based on the law because it stumbled over the salvation of the Gentiles (9:32). It is not that they failed to pursue righteousness (9:31) or lacked zeal for God (10:2), but that their zeal was unenlightened and that they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Not stopping at the idea that Israel failed to comprehend and thus to achieve righteousness, Paul takes his review one step further to the issue of faith. As we have seen in 3:27 Jewish boasting is attacked not "on the principle of works" but "on the principle of faith." And in 9:32 Israel is said to have failed because it pursued righteousness not through faith but if it were based on work. Does this mean Paul says Israel failed because it did not become Christian? No! for in 3:30 he affirms that since there is only one God, who will "justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith" Paul uses faith here not as the equivalent of faith in Christ but as a designation of the proper response to God's righteousness, whether for Israel in the law or for Gentiles in Christ. Neither here nor anywhere else does Paul intimate that the failure of the Jews lies in their refusal to become Christians. What he does say is that their boasting and their failure to attain righteousness come from a single cause - lack of faith.

What is the specific content of this faith, that Paul expects Israel to have? Clearly it bears directly on the status of the Gentiles :

- faith excludes the principle of boasting and so Israel's claim to an exclusive relation to God (3:27f);
- faith means that the promise was given to Abraham before circumcision, so that not circumcision but God's righteousness established the status of the circumcised (3:9ff);
- faith means that sonship lies in doing the Law rather than merely hearing it, Israel's possession of the Law neither guarantees salvation nor permits boasting (2:24ff);
- faith means that God's righteousness was expressed to Abraham as a promise, and thus its fulfilment cannot be understood as limited only to Israel (4:14); it is now made complete in the faith of the Gentiles who believe in him (4:22ff, cf 1:17).

The line of reasoning, then, in Paul's dispute with Israel goes like this: Why has Israel stumbled? Because the Jews have not accepted that Christ is the fulfilment of God's promises concerning the Gentiles. Why have they not accepted? Because they have insisted on righteousness through the Mosaic covenant alone. Why have they made this mistake? Because they fail to see that righteousness rests on faith, whether for Jews or Gentiles.<sup>58</sup>

Thus a fundamental component of Israel's self-understanding, the unique relationship with God through the Mosaic covenant, has been permanently rescinded. Israel had failed in its pursuit of righteousness based on the Law (9:32; 10:3); their zeal for God was

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<sup>58</sup> Gager, J G - The Origins of Anti-Semitism; p.251

unenlightened (10:2); Israel had been disobedient (11:30-32); and "a hardening has come upon a part of Israel" (11:25). And yet Paul goes to great lengths to deny that this means the end of Israel. At three points in Chapter 11 he denies that Israel has been rejected by God. In 11:12, he states that God has not rejected the people whom he foreknew. In 11:11, he denies that their stumbling leads to their fall, and in 11:28, he affirms that "the gifts and call of God are irrevocable." Even then Paul is not satisfied with these declarations, but offers several elaborations of his view that Israel has stumbled, though not as to fall. Firstly in 9:27; 11:5ff and 11:27-29, he quotes a series of scriptural texts in order to show that not even in the present has all of Israel failed to understand God's righteousness shown in Christ. The hardening has come upon only a part of Israel (11:25; cf 11:4-10). Here Paul uses the idea that a faithful remnant will be put aside by God for his purposes (Isa 10:21f; 1 Kings 19:18). This concept of representative righteousness meant that some Jews, including Paul, had recognized what God had accomplished in Christ for the Gentiles and therefore all of Israel would be saved.<sup>59</sup> Secondly, Paul turns the disobedience of the Jews into a divinely pre-ordained opportunity, foretold in scripture (9:27-33; 15:31), for God to offer salvation to the Gentiles. In fact Israel's disobedience is not only accidental to God's plan of salvation, it has become an essential part of its fulfilment. As Paul says:

Through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean. (11:11f).

Having made the redemption of the Gentiles dependent on the trespass of the Jews, Paul completes this line of reasoning by making the eventual "inclusion" (11:12) and salvation

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<sup>59</sup> Gaston, L - Israel's Misstep in the Eyes of Paul; p. 148

(11:26) of Israel dependent on the redemption of the Gentiles. Making use of the verb "to make jealous," Paul comes full circle in affirming that Israel will in turn be made jealous and return to its senses when it sees the blessings of God poured out on the Gentiles. Precisely how the failure, trespass and rejection of the Jews has led to the salvation of the Gentiles is not made clear. Yet it must be noted that Paul sees this rejection as temporary, limited to the brief period before the end. Certainly Paul expected the final events of the age in his lifetime (Rom 8:18-25; 1 Cor 14; 1 Thess 4:13-18), thus when he speaks of Israel's failure, trespass and rejection, we must remember that for Paul their duration was for years - not even decades, let alone centuries. Paul's final elaboration of his statement that Israel has stumbled without falling has to do with the ultimate return of all Israel, or as he puts it in 11:26, Israel's complete salvation. We cannot be sure whether Paul anticipated all Gentiles to be saved. He uses "fullness" to speak both of those Gentiles who are to come in (11:35) and of the Jews who will return (11:32). Yet if we use 1 Cor 15:28 as a model, we might say that Paul foresaw universal redemption without conditions. In any case, for Paul there is no doubt: "All Israel will be saved" (11:26). Why will Israel be saved? Because God will make them jealous of the salvation of the Gentiles. It should be noted that Paul does not say that God will provoke them to faith in Christ, although this is usually assumed by supercessionism. As has happened in Christian-Jewish dialogue, a nominal Jew became jealous of a Christian and so became a more faithful Jew or that a nominal Christian became jealous of a faithful Jew and so became a more faithful Christian.<sup>60</sup> While Paul does not have individuals as such in mind, surely a sound way to understand the jealousy idea, is that Israel would become more faithful to the Law.

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<sup>60</sup> A good example of this is the relationship between Rosenzweig and Rosenstock - Huessy

We must now examine the olive tree metaphor of 11:16-24. The development of the root-branches motif sums up nearly every aspect of Pauline theology concerning Israel. The primacy of Israel over the Gentiles, Israel's temporary separation from the trunk, her continued "holiness" despite the separation and assurance of her return. Furthermore, the metaphor stresses the primacy of God's righteousness over both Gentiles and Jews. For in the metaphor, Gentiles as well as Jews are compared to branches not to the trunk or the roots, in other words, both are dependent on the prior foundation of divine righteousness. However, the most important idea underlying the metaphor is that separation of a small part from the original source does not change the character of that part. Though the small part is cut off for a time from its original source, its basic nature is nonetheless fully determined by it. As Paul says, "If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches"(11:16). What gives the olive tree its character is not the branches but the root. Thus even if some of the branches have been broken off (Israel) and wild shoots grafted to the trunk, the new shoots have no right to boast. Their identity depends on the root. "If God did not spare the natural branches (Israel), neither will he spare you". Indeed, as Paul concludes, compared to the difficult task of grafting wild shoots on to the cultivated tree, how much easier will it be for God to regraft the natural ones.

We must also note that Christological language is conspicuously absent from Rom 11. The concluding doxology in 11:33-36 is, as Stendahl remarks, the only Paul doxology "without any Christological element."<sup>61</sup> Could we take this to mean that when Paul thinks and speaks of Israel's imminent restoration, he does not construe this to imply conversion to

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Among Jews and Gentiles; p.4



Christianity? Perhaps Gaston is right in proposing that Paul anticipated that all Jews would in time become followers of Christ. "But", he continues, "he does not explicitly say so."<sup>62</sup> Yes, Paul does speak of individual Jews, including himself, whose faithfulness takes the form of living "in Christ." It is presumably of such Jews that Paul is thinking in 9:24 when he refers to "us whom he had called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles" and in 11:17 when he indicates that only some of the natural branches have been broken off from the tree. But here we must be careful to distinguish between Paul's own time in which some Jews embraced Christianity and his conception of God's time in the near future when all Israel would be saved. Supercessionism would naturally point to the existence of a strong Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem as evidence against the idea that perhaps Paul does not prescribe Christ as the way to righteousness for all Jews. We would note the following :

- (i) While at the meeting in Jerusalem, Paul presumably agreed to the legitimacy of Peter's gospel to the Jews, but he never mentions it again except in Gal 2.
- (ii) If we allow an evolution in Pauline thinking on these issues, it may be that the earlier agreement in Jerusalem became increasingly irrelevant as time passed and that his self-understanding as the apostle to the Gentiles gradually moved him toward the position expressed in Romans.
- (iii) Though Paul nowhere states this explicitly, the logic of his position would lead us to believe that Jewish Christians were the exception rather than the rule, that they were a "bridge generation" between the time of Christ and the

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<sup>62</sup>

Paul and the Torah: p.67

end.<sup>63</sup> In any case, the only Jews Paul speaks about directly are himself, who became a Gentile, and all of Israel, who will be saved at the End.

Finally, we must note the irony in the argument of Rom 9:11. It would be possible to claim that Paul's basic argument against Israel was her failure to fulfil her mission to be a light to the Gentiles (Rom 2:17-19). The irony is that Israel has in fact now completed that mission, but through disobedience rather than obedience to the Law, since salvation has come to the Gentiles through their trespass! The irony is then compounded by the fact that the obedience of the formerly disobedient Gentiles will soon provoke jealousy among Jews and lead to their full restoration. Now the Gentiles have become a light unto Israel!

These are bold ideas. Not surprisingly, then, that at the end of these thoughts Paul pronounces a doxology on the mysterious workings of divine providence:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable his ways. (11:33).

The words of the doxology sound like a quiet acknowledgement of the remarkable set of ideas contained not only in Chapters 9-11 but in the entire letter to which they provide an appropriate climax.

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<sup>63</sup> Eckardt, A R - Elder and Younger Brothers; pp.137-140

### III : CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS

In the light of our exegesis of sections of Romans we come to some conclusions. For Paul, the Law and Christ are mutually exclusive categories, yet not in the sense that supercessionism understands them. The relationship between the two is such that neither invalidates the other. Paul had no problem with the Law itself. He did not understand it as a legalistic form of works righteousness, neither did he accuse Jews of legalistic observance. Rather, Paul's whole diatribe against Judaism was that they did not recognise that the significance of Christ for Gentiles was that, through him, Gentiles now have the advantages once reserved exclusively for Israel. This does not mean that Gentiles have been incorporated into God's covenant with Israel, rather God's promise leads in two separate directions, each according to its time. The promise to Abraham as father of the circumcised was fulfilled through Moses. Yet that same promise contains within it another aspect, a promise to Abraham as the father also of the uncircumcised, a promise fulfilled later in Christ. Thus the church is neither superior to the synagogue, nor its fulfilment. Lloyd Gaston expresses this idea most powerfully:

For Paul, Jesus was neither a new Moses nor the messiah, nor the climax of the history of God's dealing with Israel, but the fulfilment of God's promises concerning the gentiles, and this is what he accused the Jews of not recognizing.<sup>64</sup>

That is not to say that the interpretation of Paul developed here would have made his Jewish contemporaries any happier with him. For it is at the heart of his case that Israel's zeal for God was unenlightened. But it must be stressed that his only evidence for the unenlightened

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<sup>64</sup> Paul and the Torah: p.66

nature of their zeal for God was their refusal to recognize that God had now done for the Gentiles what he had already done for Israel!

As long as Judaism is understood as a type of Christian heresy to be fought against, there will never be an end to theological anti-Judaism. But this type of hermeneutic, which we have called supercessionism, can be undermined. For we have shown that there is room in Pauline thought for such a concept as two religions, two chosen people. For Paul has declared that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek.... neither male nor female" (Gal 3:28). That means that in Christ there is both Jew and Greek, both male and female. Just as women do not need to become men nor men women to attain their full humanity, so Jews do not need to become Gentiles nor Gentiles to become Jews. Of course, Paul is concerned to argue for the equal rights of Gentiles as members of the people of God. But that battle has long since been won, and the church, in the light of its subsequent history, needs to emphasize the other side. The right of the synagogue to retain its identity, without being defined as someone else's "mystery". As equal but elder recipients of the grace of God. All of the positive things Paul had to say about the salvation of Gentiles need not imply something negative about Israel and the Law. Indeed, it may be that Paul, and Paul alone among the New Testament writers, teaches no theological anti-Judaism.

In no way can we claim to have solved the problem of supercessionism by our brief exegesis of Romans; neither are all the loose ends tied up, but that is not the point. For our argument is simply the opening line of a discussion, a brief attempt to show that there are possibilities for another starting point in the scripture concerning the synagogue. That there

is a chance to develop a better model for a relationship between church and synagogue. That we can use our scripture with integrity in the post-Holocaust age without having to resort to radical surgery. Such a reinterpretation of the church's tradition in relation to our revisionist reading of Paul will have profound consequences for theology. For what is theology, after all, but reinterpretation of tradition. In the light of the new model of relationship between church and synagogue, the church will have to examine its doctrines of trinity, ecclesiology and, especially, christology. Our task has been simply to lay the foundation for that discussion.

In the light of the above we make the following proposals:

- (1) That we as the church reject the Baum/Reuther thesis as incorrect.<sup>65</sup> Scripture can be saved from the charge of anti-Judaism and this means we can preach the gospel without at the same time denigrating Judaism. While we do admit that some parts of the scripture are anti-Jewish, we follow the principle that the concrete injunction is annulled by the overarching principle. Thus, in the post-Holocaust age, Paul's positive attitude toward the synagogue becomes the overarching principle for the church.
- (2) That we as the church confer with the use of the image of engraftment. This metaphor means that we Gentiles have been engrafted, as wild shoots, into the trunk, which is God's righteousness, a trunk that already has natural branches attached. These natural branches represent Israel. Theologically this means that the church

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<sup>65</sup> See p.44

and synagogue represent two related but different covenants - both expressions of God's will.

- (3) That we as the church reconsider the nature of our witness to the synagogue. It is obviously right to speak of Christianity as having a universalistic witness. The membership of the church is based on faith in Christ, and an understanding that his Lordship extends over all peoples. Yet should the Christianization of the world be the aim of our witness? Or could it be something less self-glorifying? A witness centred in God's mysterious plan for the renewal of the whole creation. A mission more in line with being a light for the Gentiles?

We know that phrase from the New Testament, both from the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:32) and from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:16) "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven," - not . . . become Christians. And the one who gives a cup of water to you, since you are a disciple, that "outsider," shall not lose the reward (Matt 10:42), a word that in Mark is part of Jesus' scathing critique of the cliquishness of the disciples (Mk 9:41). Furthermore, the whole world will be judged by how they have treated the witnessing church (Matt 25:31-46).

This all indicates that the world is not divided between those who accept Jesus and *massa perditionis*. The church is a witnessing body, that somehow God "needs" in his total mission, the *missio Dei*. It is urgent for us as a church in a pluralistic world to find our place, our particular and peculiar place as a faithful witness to Christ, but leaving the result of the witness in the hands of God. Paul began in Rom 9:11, by making it clear he would like

Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah, he even swears that he is willing to be "accursed and cut off from Christ" if that would help to that end (Rom 9:1 cf 10:1). But before he is finished, he lectures the gentile Christians (11:13) that they have no business in trying to convert the Jews. Paul seems to have discerned two things: (1) an attitude of superiority and conceit in the gentile Christians (11:25), which makes them unsuited for such a mission; and (2) that the Jesus movement is to be a Gentile movement - apart from the significant remnant, the link by grace (11:5). For Paul these insights lead to a stress on the mysterious nature of God's mission: "Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery...." (Rom 11:25). And the mystery is that the salvation of Israel is in God's hands, and that the "no" of Israel was not toward her rejection, but in order to open up the salvation for the Gentiles (11:11).

Paul's reflections in Rom 9-11 give us a clue to the issue of a witnessing style in which the mysterious *missio Dei* may call for new ways for us to claim the Lordship of Christ without conceit. Paul has given us a reflection on the dangers of a thoughtless universalism about how witness without mystery can become oppressive.

Not that Paul's gentile Christians felt that they were being conceited. They thought they were witnessing to the truth and they were, but in a manner that suggested that God's only way was that everyone became like themselves. They did not understand this witness, as a witness of a peculiar community in a world of communities. That for Paul was wrong. They became proud, they did not "stand in awe." (Rom 11:20).

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