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# A THEOLOGY OF TENSION RESULTING FROM THE JUXTAPOSITION OF CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE\*

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## III. THE CHURCH AND ISRAEL

So far the juxtaposition was of Church and Synagogue. The reason for this is that on the plane of history the Synagogue acted as spokesman for the Jewish people. But in the theological context, the situation looks different. However much we may admire the Synagogue and its achievement, the Covenant belongs to the people and not to the Synagogue. The Synagogue is only incidental in the life of historic Israel.

The distinction between Israel and Synagogue is specially important in the area of tension. In Israel as a people the Church is not confronted with another religion but with another aspect of election. In other words, the tension which arises from the juxtaposition of Church and Israel is not merely the result of religion *versus* religion; it goes much deeper than a mere difference of opposing views. It touches upon a fundamental issue, namely the question of identification: which of the twain is Israel, the Jewish people or the Christian Church?

This question of identification is not a matter of historical development. It did not begin with Gentile Christianity claiming to be "new" Israel. It goes back to the O.T. itself.

### *1. Israel and Israel in the O.T.*

We cannot speak of Israel in the biblical context without speaking of election. The concept of election is at the very heart

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\*Cf. *Judaica*, 1963, H. 2

of the prophetic view regarding Israel. The prophets' problem was how to explain the paradox arising from two contradictory facts: Israel's election and Israel's faithlessness. There could be only one answer, namely that God's grace goes beyond man's worthiness. In my book, *A Theology of Election*, I therefore say: "Election in the Bible is not an ethical but a strictly theological concept. It carries a paradox and therefore defies logic: it means election of sinners first and foremost<sup>35</sup>." The biblical concept of election is however not stated in terms of theological language but in the pattern of a people's life. The story of Israel is at the same time the story of God's judgement and His grace.

The genesis of Israel begins with the election of one single individual: Abram responds to the call and receives the promise: "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Election is always with a purpose: God calls for the sake of others. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to be called by God. Man cannot have the privilege without the responsibility or the responsibility without the privilege. Election means to accept both in their interdependence.

Biblical election therefore has a double aspect: on God's part election is irrevocable, a free act of grace. God is not like man to repent of His pre-ordained council. "The Glory of Israel will not lie or repent," says the Bible, "for He is not a man that He should repent" (1 Sam. 15. 29). But on the human side, election has a condition attached to it: "if you will obey my voice and keep my commandment, you will be my special possession among all peoples — a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19. 5f.). The ambiguity of Israel's position springs from this two-fold aspect of election: the irrevocable will of God and the contingency of choice within the limits of human freedom.

Israel's problem, as the problem of all men, is to harmonize his high calling with a life worthy of it. The Bible constantly reminds Israel of his vocation: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own special possession" (Deut. 14. 2), therefore: "if you obey

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<sup>35</sup> J. Jocz: *A Theol. of Election*, 1958, p. 189.

the voice, being careful to do all his commandments . . . the Lord your God will set upon you above all the nations of the earth" (Deut. 28. 1). But there is the other side to it: "if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God, or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you" (Deut. 28. 15). This is the terrible responsibility of election.

To be God's people, means to be a holy people: you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy (Lev. 19. 2; cf. Lev. 11. 44f.; 20. 7, 26). There is no other way to approve oneself as the people of the holy God of Israel.

There are thus two Israels in the Bible: the ideal Israel called to holiness as the true servant of God, and historic Israel, with all his human weakness and failure. The discrepancy between Israel seen ideally and Israel seen empirically is indicated by the moral dualism in which man finds himself. In history, neither Israel, nor any other people, can ever live up to his high calling. Here man can only strive after, but he can never achieve the ultimate. Yet to resign and give up the struggle, is to betray his trust and to lose his dignity as man. The prophet's task is therefore to prod his people and to keep Israel mindful of his high calling. This he does by holding up as in a mirror his people's true image: "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers!" cries the prophet. There is probably no more scathing indictment in the whole Bible as the first chapter of Isaiah.

But the prophetic task is not merely to indict. The very chapter which begins with words of bitter invective, carries at the same time the message of reconciliation: "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord" (s. 1. 18). The prophet who knows the starkness of his people's sin also knows the depth of God's forgiving grace. Here then is the paradox: on the one hand a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, on the other hand, God's special people, called to holiness. Perhaps Goethe's famous saying best expresses the meaning of the prophetic challenge: *werde was du bist* — become what you are!

As a people called by God, Israel is His people; as a people of evildoers, it is not God's people. In this tension between 'ammi

and *l'o-'ammi* (Hos. 2. 23) Israel's life takes place. The distinction between Israel as *'ammi* and Israel as *l'o-'ammi* is not just a manner of speech; it is a real distinction: seen vertically, Israel is God's people; seen horizontally, Israel is not God's people. There are thus two Israels: the holy people of God, chosen to do His will, and historic Israel, floundering between loyalty to Baal and loyalty to Yahwe (cf. 1 Kings 18. 21).

## 2. *Israel and Israel in the N.T.*

The antinomy between God's holy people and Israel in all his human weakness is carried over from the O.T. to the N.T. The dividing line between Israel and Israel is here drawn on the question of repentance. The call to repentance is the characteristic message of the Prophets. Both, John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth continue their work within the prophetic tradition. This call to *teshubah*: turning round, changing course, taking a new direction, re-orientation towards God, is the call to become what God wants Israel to be: His people.

As in the O.T., so in the N.T., there are those who accept the challenge and respond and those who become hardened and refuse to repent. It is in this situation that the prophetic concept of the "remnant" comes into play. The startling aspect of the remnant lies in the reversal of all human standards: the pious, the religious, the "good," are those who are obdurate; the publicans, the sinners, the godless, are those who enter the Kingdom of God. This sifting of the remnant from among Israel does not start with the Gospel. The process begins at the moment when Israel enters the covenant. The majority dance round the golden calf; the minority refuse to bow the knee to Baal. It is of special significance that Aaron, the High Priest, is involved in this act of betrayal. Here is the crassest exposure of religion: it does not matter which god, as long as *a* god is worshipped.

The idea of the remnant comes out most clearly in the attitude of Jesus to the crowd: he speaks in parables so that those who

have ears to hear may hear. He says to his disciples: "to you it is given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Mtt. 13. 10f.). No fatalism is implied in this utterance: they are not given because they refuse to accept. This becomes obvious from our Lord's remark regarding Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, *but you would not*" (Luke 13. 34): *we-'atem l'o 'avitem* is an echo of the prophet's identical accusation (cf. Ez. 3. 7; 20. 8).

In the case of the Apostle Paul, the distinction is even more pronounced: here Israel and Israel stand in obvious opposition. On the one side the many who claim to be Israel but refuse God's offer of salvation, on the other side the small remnant who make no claims except the grace of God. This raised the question: who was a Jew? St. Paul, in his effort to clarify the position, gives several answers:

1. Primarily, a Jew is a person who obeys God's Law — circumcision by itself does not make one a Jew.

2. The outward signs of Jewishness must correspond with an inward attitude: a real Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is primarily a matter of the heart.

3. Gentiles who are without the Law yet fulfil the requirements of the Law, are already God's people though historically outside Israel; by the same token, Jews who break the Law are not God's people.

This raises the question: what advantage then has a Jew?

St. Paul answers that God is the God of all men. In himself the Jew has no advantage, together with the Greek, he is under the power of sin. The only advantage he has is in God's promise: for the faithlessness of man does not nullify the faithfulness of God (cf. Rom. 3. 3). For this reason, God has not cast off His people and His gift and call of Israel is irrevocable (Rom. 11. 29). In the end, God will triumph over Israel as He will triumph over all mankind. Meanwhile the Gospel is accepted by a remnant "chosen by grace" (Rom. 11. 5).

Here then, we have a situation similar to the one in the O.T.: Israel in the mass and Israel in the remnant.

If we understand St. Paul aright, there seems to be an inward and an outward participation of election; the two do not always correspond. To prove his point the Apostle refers to Israel's crossing of the Red Sea: all were under the cloud, all passed through the water, all partook of the spiritual food, all drank of the spiritual drink, "nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased." Apparently, it is not enough to be involved in the drama of salvation, unless man participates inwardly and responds with the heart, he remains a stranger to God. The best illustration of this is the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son.

Underlying the concept of the remnant is the dialectic between national and individual existence. As a nation Israel is God's chosen people, but the individual Jew, like the individual Greek, must find his own personal relationship to God. He cannot hide behind the election of his people; that he is a son of Abraham does not make him automatically a son of God. But the tension between rejection and election cuts even deeper than the dialectic between national and individual election. The believer who responds to the call of repentance, is not a believer all the time. This arises from the ambivalence under which human life takes place. It means that even the Christian stands under judgement and grace: "let every one who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10. 11f.). This is of supreme importance for our discussion of the Church.

### *3. The Church and Israel*

When we move from the N.T. into the wider arena of Church history, we discover Israel in a new context.

A term which was originally ethnically and geographically defined, acquires now a new connotation. It is part of the revolutionary nature of the Gospel to have both deepened and enlarged the concept Israel. The people of God is now comprising all believers in Jesus Christ, irrespective of ethnic and cultural origin. It is the Messiah's triumph that the God of Israel becomes the God of the nations. From henceforth, Gentile believers in Jesus Christ enter the Covenant and are grafted into the stem of Israel;

they become heirs of the promises and members of the commonwealth of God's people. The national history of the Hebrew people becomes *Vorgeschichte* of the Church; Palestine becomes the Holy Land of Christendom; Gentiles call Abraham their father and become "Jews" though only in a spiritual sense. Here Justin Martyr speaks for the Church at large: "As therefore, Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, even so we, who have been quarried out from the belly of Christ, we are the true Israelite race."

Justin continues to explain to his opponent that there are now "two seeds of Judah, and two races, as there are two houses of Jacob: the one begotten by blood and flesh, the other by faith and the spirit<sup>36</sup>."

The parable of the three rings which Lessing used in his *Nathan the Wise*, to illustrate the relativity of the claim to absolute authenticity on the part of the three world-religions, the Church Fathers would repudiate as false. They inherited the tradition from the early Church and specially from the Pauline letters that it is not blood and flesh but faith and the spirit which constitutes the true Israel. They had no doubts about their own position: as the Church of Jesus Christ by faith and the Spirit they were the Israel of God. The *other* Israel has forfeited his right to the promise by rejecting the Messiah.

To go back to the story of the three rings. The underlying assumption of the fable is that there can be only one genuine ring though no one knows any more which one it is. Herein lies the mistaken reasoning of the Church. She has inherited the biblical concept of the remnant but has failed to apply it to herself. The mistake has something to do with the question of eschatological fulfilment. The early Church spoke in terms of realized eschatology. St. Paul reminds believers in Corinth that the end of the ages has come upon them (1 Cor. 10. 11). But there is a difference between standing at the brink of fulfilment and the complete realization of the Messianic hope which spells out the end of history. Such a mistake could only be made in the heat of the controversy, but it unfortunately became an established tradition. St. Paul himself

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<sup>36</sup> Justin: Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 135.



was more modest in his claim: he knew not to have attained already but strained forward to what lies ahead (Phil. 3. 13). St. Augustine, who had to face the question of history and fulfilment in all seriousness, fell back upon a definition of the Church similar to the definition of Israel in the Bible; not all of Israel are Israel. The Church is both, the Kingdom of God and part and parcel of this world: here the *electi* and *reprobi* co-exist side by side<sup>37</sup>. But Christian theology was not able to keep the balance between "already and not yet"<sup>38</sup>, it so embellished the doctrine of the Church that it became to mean *immediate* and *realized* salvation in history. The sacramental teaching of the Church greatly contributed to such a doctrine. By making salvation a realized experience, the tension between "already" and "not yet" was resolved by a psychological illusion. Faith was externalized in terms of dogma and Church and Kingdom became identical. We have here a repetition of Israel's mistaken position in history: the promises to God's people become the inheritable privilege of the individual by the accident of birth. Baptism takes the place of circumcision and the canons of the Church become a substitute for the Law of Moses. Orthodoxy is a Gentile substitution for rabbinic legalism. In fact we can see in Catholic Christianity a new form of Judaism.

The difficulty about the situation lies in the fact that the position of the Church as the position of the Synagogue has some truth behind it.

It is true that the "accident" of birth has providential character. It is a privilege to be born in a Christian home as it is a privilege to be born in a Jewish home. Admission to the Covenant is an act of grace irrespective of whether the infant is aware of the significance of baptism or circumcision. But there is an ambiguity involved in the teaching of the Church which derives from a misunderstanding of the nature of history, from the position of man before God, and from the nature of the Church as the people of God.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. Jocz: A Spiritual History of Israel, p. 209f.

<sup>38</sup> *Ib.*, p. 219, 231ff.

(a) *The suspense of history.* We cannot understand the meaning of history unless we see it as the category of suspense. Here lies the difference between the pagan and the biblical point of view. The Gentile derives meaning from the given-ness of the world. That is why Greek philosophy begins with the four elements. For the Bible the meaning of the world lies outside itself. The world has only meaning in as much as it serves the purpose assigned to it by God. In itself it is of a transitory nature: biblical man looks to a new heaven and a new earth. History is only an interlude for the Age to Come. The Church is the body of believers living within the category of renewal. In other words, she is a waiting Church living in suspense between the two Advents. She is looking to the day when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. The Bible calls it the Day of the Lord, the Great Day, the Day of Salvation. Believers are "sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4. 30), and though the night is far spent and the day is dawning (Rom. 13. 12), while history lasts, it has not yet fully come.

The deification of the Church which Kierkegaard describes as permanent rebellion against God, has something to do with human impatience. Like historic Israel, the Church tries to overlook the dialectic between being and becoming. She claims to have already overcome the suspense of history and to have tasted full salvation. The pilgrim Church, the Church in dispersion, behaves as if she were already *in patria*.

Whereas history spells it out in a thousand ways: "not yet," the religious man in his exuberance shouts "already!" But whenever the Church refuses to be the waiting Church and begins to build the Kingdom in her own strength, she aligns herself with the Synagogue and makes the world her only hope.

(b) *Man before God.* To understand man's creaturely position before God we have to fall back upon the biblical category of absolute distinction between creature and Creator. The moral dualism of our human existence follows logically from this basic fact. In the context of history it means that man is in the making; the old Adam is being transformed into the New Adam in the image and likeness of God's Son (2 Cor. 3. 18). It is inherent in

history that nothing is ever completed, for history means constant change. The "metamorphosis" from rebels into sons is an unfinished process on this side of life. Significantly enough the R. S. V. translates the text: ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν "from one degree of glory to another." A Christian is always becoming one, a Jew is born a Jew, this fact was clearly seen by Franz Rosenzweig<sup>39</sup>. A Christian who claims to be one, is a hypocrite. Kierkegaard's bitter complaint was that the majority of people live under the illusion that they are Christians whereas in fact man can only exercise himself in Christian living — and even this depends on the grace of daily renewal.

Here the other biblical category of *Yir'at 'Adonai* comes into full play: the fear of the Lord is only real when I know myself a sinner in need of grace. In this realistic assessment of my position before God all the other biblical categories fall into place: the category of mediation as the basis for a divine-human relationship, the category of moral dualism whereby I discover myself in the tension between good and evil, and the suspense of faith whereby I learn that man's strength is in weakness; become the woof and warp of a Christian life.

(c) *The Church as the people of God.* We have made a distinction between Israel collectively and the individual Jew. A similar distinction obtains between Church and the Christian believer. The faithlessness of the Church as the faithlessness of historic Israel does not annul God's promises. The Church remains the Church, as Israel remains Israel, by reason of God's faithfulness. But in history she can only exist as the militant Church, not so much fighting to conquer, as fighting to become what God wants her to be — namely the Church of Jesus Christ.

This being the Church of Jesus Christ she cannot take for granted. She cannot depend upon any historic claims, ministry, sacraments or anything else, but upon God's decision that she be the Church. Her position runs parallel to the position of Israel: Israel is God's people by divine decree and not by desert. The

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<sup>39</sup> Franz Rosenzweig: *Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 497.

Church is not the Church because of her obvious holiness and loyalty to her Lord, she is only the Church by election.

But the case of the individual is different: a Jew is not a Jew who is one outwardly; a Christian is not a Christian because of his inherited tradition. A person is a Christian only if he strives to be one. It does not work automatically. We are in wholehearted sympathy with Kierkegaard's contention: it is not a matter of knowing the truth but being the truth<sup>40</sup>. In terms of personal responsibility Jews and Gentiles are in the same position. In terms of collective existence both are God's people and not God's people: they are God's people by promise and not God's people by reason of failure to be the people of God.

Is there a difference then between Church and Israel?

#### *4. The challenge of the two Israels*

The Bible has no plural for Israel. There cannot be two peoples of God. God's people is one and indivisible. The tension between Israel and Israel is an inner tension. The plural is more a grammatical convenience than a theological definition. It is the merit of K. Barth to have pointed the way to a reexamination of Israel's relation to the Church. Barth refuses to separate historic Israel from the messianic community. By reason of Israel's election, he belongs to the people of God by divine decree. There is however a difference: Israel is separated from the Church in his rejection of the Messiah. The dichotomy within the people of God is the great schism of the Church.

Both Church and Israel are elected in the Messiah for He is the ground of God's election of man. In Barth's own words: "In the eternal election of the one man Jesus of Nazareth, God makes Himself a witness to the Covenant which He has decided to establish between Himself and man. . . ."<sup>41</sup> The elected community and

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. S. Kierkegaard: *Einübung im Christentum*, transl. by A. Bärthold, 1894, p. 239.

<sup>41</sup> Ch. Dogm. II/2, p. 233 (Engl.).

the Messiah belong together: "the whole community — Israel and the Church — is elected in this way and appointed to this service, as certainly as it is elected in Jesus Christ, as certainly as it owes to Him its existence, its unity and the differentiation of its two forms."

It appears however that Barth makes a permanent distinction between Israel and Church. Even if Israel were to accept his Messiah and enter the Church, he would still be Israel *in* the Church "without encroaching on the Church as such<sup>42</sup>." Barth, undoubtedly, has theological reasons for disallowing Israel's assimilation to the Christian community. We suspect that one of his reasons is historical: at the beginning the Church consisted of two parts: Jews and Gentiles. Another reason is his view of election: it is an irrevocable decision. The main reason however is Israel's witness not only to the world but to the Church that God is and remains the God of Israel. Israel's existence therefore is a sign of God's grace and as such must persist through history. Barth however overlooks a point of great importance, and this is the "Jewishness" of the Church, though he comes very close to it. These are his words: "A Church that becomes anti-Semitic or even a-semitic sooner or later suffers loss of its faith by losing the object of it<sup>43</sup>." The obvious inference is that the Church is "semitic" and not just by historic association with the Jewish people but specially by reason of the fact that the roots of the Church are in the Messiah who was born a Jew. In other words there can only be a Jewish Church if Abraham is the father of all believers. The Gentiles therefore are the proselytes, Israel is at home in the Church. But the Gentiles do not enter as a separate group within the people of God, this was St. Paul's main contention. Through Christ they have become part of Israel: for He is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2. 13f.).

According to Ephesians, messianic man is almost a hybrid of Jew and Gentile, "one new man in place of the two" (Eph. 2. 15).

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<sup>42</sup> *Ib.*, p. 235.

<sup>43</sup> *Ib.*, p. 234.

This of course is a figure of speech. The point the Apostle is making is that in Christ Jews and Gentiles are reconciled into one body. The believing remnant of Israel has thus assumed responsibility for the nations and has allowed them into the fellowship of the people of God. Thus the promise to Abraham is fulfilled: "in thee all the nations of the earth will be blessed." The strangers and sojourners have through faith in the Messiah become fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2. 19). The Gentiles together with Jewish believers have now access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2. 18). As there cannot be a special department for Gentiles so there cannot be a special department for Jews in the Church of God.

But in history there is always a distressing lag between the messianic ideal and empirical facts. Here Church and Israel face each other not as brothers but as foes. Israel is not concerned with the Gentiles and the Gentiles despise Israel.

There is no need for us to dwell upon the sad story of Israel's experience in Christendom. In her attitude to the Jewish people, the Church has proved again and again that she is not the Church of Jesus Christ. We believe that it is within the providence of God that the Church has to face Israel as the painful reminder of her own failure. Psychologists have suggested that Christian anti-Semitism is an overt expression of self-hatred. In the Jew the Christian sees himself in his hidden "No" to Jesus Christ. By hating the Jew he hates his own unbelief. Much of missionary zeal to convert the Jews is motivated by a desire to obviate one's own disloyalty as a Christian.

Like Israel who is both *'ammi* and *l'o-'ammi* so the individual is both believer and unbeliever, *simul justus et peccator*. The Church is both the household of God and the Synagogue of Satan. In this situation of being and not being the Church, she faces Israel as the great rival: which is the people of God, which *is* Israel?

The division is not horizontally historical but the vertical line of faith. "There is no horizontal line to draw a clear cut division<sup>44</sup>" between Israel and Church; they constantly overlap. Apart from

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<sup>44</sup> J. Jocz: *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, p. 322.

being the *corpus mysticum*, Church and Israel are historic entities within a social structure. In such a context faith means the realization of social ends. Here Israel as a community, as a fellowship, as a family, questions the Church about her unity, about her fellowship, about her family cohesion: is the divided, splintered, broken body of Christ, the people of God?

In the same social context, Israel with his prophetic zeal for social justice asks her opposite how she manages to reconcile the anguish of the nations with her messianic faith.

But the Church too has some embarrassing questions to ask about Israel's repose in himself, his lack of missionary zeal, his rejection of the Messiah, his "preoccupation with mundane hopes." On the arena of history Israel and Church thus face each other in a moral challenge. Unless the Church manages to make Israel jealous of her moral grandeur and her devotion to God, she is not quite the Church of Jesus Christ. Unless Israel approves himself as the servant of God, he is not quite Israel. The fact is that in the area of moral values Israel and Church cease to be collective entities and face each other in the encounter of Jews and Christians. In the last resort, faith can only be expressed in terms of a personal life. Faith, says Barth, is "putting one's confidence in God's mercy as it is attested to man — both Jew and Gentile — by God Himself in His promise<sup>45</sup>." This can only be done by individuals and never *en masse*. "The Church is in existence," says Barth, wherever the promise finds faith — among both Jew and Gentile. . . .<sup>46</sup>" No one has the monopoly upon God's mercy; He is no respecter of persons. The privileged are always in greater peril: God fills the hungry with good things and the rich he sends empty away (Luke 1. 53). If the Jew has proved himself an "inattentive and inaccurate" listener of God's promise<sup>47</sup>, the Christian too can do with a hearing-aid. The test lies in the measure of our obedience. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in

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<sup>45</sup> Op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>46</sup> Ib., p. 235.

<sup>47</sup> Ib., p. 236.

heaven" (Mtt. 7. 21). "By their fruits, ye shall know them." Here the parable of the two sons finds its apt application: the first son said "no," but then bethought himself and went to work in the vineyard; the second son said "yes," but never went: which of the two did the will of his father? (Mtt. 21. 28 ff.). "Here there is only one division: between the man in his *actual*, existential situation says yes, and the man who in his *actual*, existential situation says no to the challenge which Jesus Christ presents<sup>48</sup>."

Church and Israel can only speak to each other in the voice of individual people. As such they meet in their creaturely situation: man and man before God. In the awareness of the Otherness of God, within the challenge of right and wrong, in the fear of the Lord who is a jealous God, they can only make one claim, God's mercy.

In the last resort it is only the knowledge of the depth of God's mercy which makes the difference between man and man.

#### IV. LAW AND GRACE

The preceding chapter ended with the sentence: the knowledge of God's mercy constitutes the difference between man and man. Our present subject: Law and Grace is the background for this statement. Knowledge of God creates the difference between one person and another. In every other respect all men are equals before God. They may differ in their endowments, gifts and qualities, but this is not an essential difference. What contrasts man from man is his knowledge of God. In the last resort, "Judaism" and "Christianity" are mere labels to differentiate between two historic phenomena, the real difference lies at the level of personal life.

It is sometimes held by Christian scholars that grace is the characteristic doctrine of the Church, whereas the Synagogue knows only about the Law. This is an injustice which needs to be rectified. Both Church and Synagogue know about Law and Grace, but they know it differently.

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<sup>48</sup> J. Jocz: *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, p. ...



## 1. *The Torah*

To Judaism the Law is not a burden but a privilege. It constitutes the visible sign of God's grace to Israel. The Torah is the charter of Israel's election and contains the title deeds of the Covenant at Sinai.

The Torah is not for Israel's punishment but his blessing. The Rabbis commenting on the text "I am the Lord who heals thee" (Ex. 15. 26), make God say to Moses: "Say to the children of Israel, the words of the Law which I have given you are a source of healing for you and of life," as it is said "they are life to those who find them, a healing to all their flesh" (Prov. 6. 22)<sup>49</sup>. They likened the words of the Torah to a medicine of life<sup>50</sup>. The Rabbis made much of the text in Lev. 18. 5: "keep my statutes: through them shall a man live<sup>51</sup>." "As the lily dies only with its scent, so Israel will not die so long as it executes the commandments, and does good deeds<sup>52</sup>." They would have reacted with horror to the suggestion made by some of the Church Fathers that the Jews were given the Law for their punishment and not for their blessing<sup>53</sup>. That the Law only reveals God's wrath and not His grace is a strange aberration and is based upon a misunderstanding of Pauline teaching. It was the writer of the Epistle of Barnabas who suggested that the Jews never received the original law at all, for Moses broke the tables<sup>54</sup>.

The attitude of the N.T. is quite different, it speaks the same language as the O.T. and operates with the same categories; it knows the same God. Both parts of the Bible stand upon the same foundation: God's covenant with His people. We have seen that there are not two Israels; the N.T. knows nothing of a "new" Israel. It is even doubtful whether the term "new Covenant" has the meaning it later acquired, as if God had changed His mind

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<sup>49</sup> C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe: *Rabbinic Anthology*, p. 124f.

<sup>50</sup> *Ib.*, p. 296.

<sup>51</sup> *Rabbinic Anth.*, *ib.*, p. 116.

<sup>52</sup> *Ib.*, p. 118.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Irenaeus: *Against Heresies*, IV, 15, 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Barnabas*, ch. 14.

and altered His purpose with Israel. Jesus Christ did not come to abrogate the Law but to fulfil it. He is only the "end" of the Law because he is its *telos*. St. Paul plainly says that the Law is holy and that the commandment is holy, just and good (Rom. 7. 12); later on he says that he delights in the law of God (Rom. 7. 22). His problem is not the Law but himself; his inability to live up to it. It is at this point that the difference between the Christian and the Jew becomes visible: while the Jew says he can, the Christian knows that he cannot. On the question of the sanctity of the Torah both are agreed.

It is most unfortunate that Christians dissociate the Torah from the grace of God. It is in the Law that God reveals Himself as "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy and truth (or faithfulness) (Ex. 34. 6).

Here *Yir'at 'Adonai* is not a negative but a positive quality, it is the basis of all moral values. It is no accident that the Bible calls it the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111. 20; Prov. 1. 7). The fear of the Lord is the basis of the knowledge of God not theoretically but in daily living. For the Rabbis *da'at 'Elohim* meant *imitatio Dei*. Only so does man know God in that he expresses this knowledge in action. According to the *Midrash* God said to Moses: "Go, tell the Israelites, my children, as I am pure, so be you pure; as I am holy, so be you holy," as it is said: "Holy shall you be, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." The Rabbis punned the phrase *we-'anwehu* (I will praise him) to read *ani wa-hu* (I and He) in the sense: I am like Him; as He is merciful and gracious so be you merciful and gracious<sup>55</sup>. The Israelite's duty is to imitate his heavenly Father. Only thus can Israel approve himself as the *'am segullah* — God's special people.

The Torah is therefore Israel's charter and guide to holiness. "Traditionally," I said in another connection, "the Synagogue has always connected *mattan torah* (the giving of the Law) with Israel's election. Shoeps has shown how the experience at Sinai stands in the centre of Israel's vocation: by the giving of the Law original sin was washed away and a new people came into existence<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Rabb. Anthol., p. 279.

<sup>56</sup> H. J. Schoeps: *Judaica*, III, 1946, p. 192.

Commitment to the Law makes the difference between Israel and the nations: the Torah is Israel's distinctive mark. . .<sup>57</sup>."

(a) *The Law in the liturgy.* It is not by accident that the Scroll of the Law occupies the central position in the body of the Synagogue. It is placed at the East Wall facing the congregation as a constant reminder of its central importance. The liturgy is so constructed as to make the reading of the Scroll the highlight of the service.

The Reader opens the ark and together with the congregation recites: "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, O Lord, and thine enemies shall be scattered, and they that hate thee shall flee before thee. For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Blessed be he who in his holiness gave the Law to his people Israel."

As he takes the Scroll from the ark he says to the Congregation: "Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." Reader and Congregation: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine, O Lord, is the kingdom, and the supremacy as head over all. Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool: holy is he. Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mount; for the Lord our God is holy."

"May the Father of mercy have mercy upon a people that have been borne by him. May he remember the covenant with the patriarchs, deliver our souls from evil hours, check the evil inclination in them that have been carried by him, grant us of his grace an everlasting deliverance, and in the attribute of his goodness fulfil our desires by salvation and mercy."

After careful removal of the ornaments and the mantle, the Scroll is placed on the desk and as the Reader unrolls it he says: "And may his kingdom be soon revealed and made visible unto us, and may he be gracious unto our remnant and unto the remnant of his people, the house of Israel, granting them grace, kindness, mercy and favour; and let us say, Amen. Ascribe, all of you, greatness unto our God, and render honour to the Law."

<sup>57</sup> J. Jocz: *Theol. of Election*, p. 65.

To be called to read a portion of the Law during the Service is a special privilege and in most Synagogues it is an honour to be paid for in money. When the person to read is called, he says: "Blessed be he, who in his holiness gave the Law unto his people Israel. The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The Lord will give strength unto his people: the Lord will bless his people with peace. As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a shield unto all them that trust in him."

Reader and Congregation: "And ye that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day."

Each reader pronounces a blessing before and after the reading of the portion and the congregation responds:

"Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast given us the Law of truth, and hast planted everlasting life in our midst. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who givest the Law."

At the conclusion of the reading, the *hagbaha* or elevation of the Scroll is almost similar to the elevation of the Host in the Roman Church. The Reader holding up the Scroll in front of him for all to see, says: "This is the Law which Moses set before the children of Israel, according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses. It is a tree of life to them that grasp it, and of them that uphold it every one is rendered happy. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace. Length of days is in its right hand; in its left hand are riches and honour. It pleased the Lord, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify the Law and to make it honourable."

The Scroll is carried in procession, kissed, almost fondled, then dressed with all its ornaments and placed back in the ark<sup>58</sup>.

In front of the ark is suspended the *ner tamid* (perpetual light). While in use the Scroll is always surrounded by a group of men to do it honour. The Scroll is invalid if any defect is found. A super-

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<sup>58</sup> The sequence here followed is that of Singer's Prayer Book. Other customs regarding the "Liturgy of the Desk" are described by Lewis N. Dembitz: *Jewish Services in Synagogue and Home*, 1898, p. 276ff.

fluous or even a deficient single letter which may vary the reading of one word makes the Scroll unusable. If three mistakes are found in it the reading is prohibited until corrected; even when the parchment is broken it must not be used until repaired. The *Segan* or Warden stands by to supervise the reading; during intervals while readers change, the scroll is carefully covered with the mantle. While it is carried about and for the elevation the whole Congregation stands up in reverence. There are rules for the readers, how to stand while reading, how to handle it, how to roll it up, etc.

If in reading a mistake occurs, the word must be repeated correctly. If a word is skipped the whole verse must be re-read and the following verses. Whilst saying the benedictions the reader must not look into the Scroll so as not to give the impression that these benedictions are part of the text<sup>59</sup>.

The production of the scroll itself is accomplished under the most scrupulous rules of purity. Special care is required over the writing of God's holy Name. Each time the Name is to be written the scribe is to declare: "I intend to write the holy Name." Once he has begun to write he must not be interrupted until he finished. If an error occurs it must not be erased as is done with other words, but the whole sheet must be replaced and the defective sheet buried.

The secretary of the Jewish Museum in London writes: "There can be no question about the tremendous respect accorded to a Sefer Torah by the Orthodox Jew. Just as the Torah itself, according to Jewish tradition, has a holy character as the revelation of God, so too, its physical form, the Scroll of the Law, is regarded holy. Hence, in accordance with Talmudic regulations, not only is the Scroll of the Law deeply respected, rejoiced over (at Simchat Torah), mourned for, and when no longer usable, buried with solemn ceremonies, but it has also become the object of many special rules and regulations which are as scrupulously observed today as they were 2000 years ago<sup>60</sup>."

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<sup>59</sup> *Laws and Customs of Israel*, trans. and compiled by G. Friedlander, London, 1921, p. 30ff.

<sup>60</sup> Sol Cohen: *The Scroll of the Law*. *Jewish Chronicle*, March 7, 1958, p. 19.

(b) *The study of torah in Jewish piety.* To the pious Jew *torah* comprises much more than is contained in the Pentateuch. It includes, in addition to the written Law, the whole unwritten tradition with all the customs, precepts and rabbinic injunctions. Knowledge of *torah* is not a matter for experts but is the obligation of every Jew: "Every Israelite must fix a certain time by day and by night when to study the Torah, at least after his prayers he should study the laws which are essential for every Israelite to know. If one cannot study through inability to learn. . . he should support others who devote themselves to study. . .<sup>61</sup>." Study begins at the earliest possible age and continues all through life. A boy who is ready to become a *bar mizvah* at the age of 13 is already well instructed in the way of his fathers.

The Rabbis regarded study of the Law "man's highest excellence or glory<sup>62</sup>." It serves as a surrogate for the Temple worship and atones for sins as did the sacrifices: "God foresaw that the Temple would be destroyed and He said, 'While the Temple exists, and you bring sacrifices, the Temple atones for you; when the Temple is not there, what shall atone for you? Busy yourselves with the words of the Law, for they are equivalent to sacrifices, and they will atone for you'<sup>63</sup>."

What study of Torah really means to Jewish piety can be seen even from a cursory glance at *Pirke Abot* (Ethics of the Fathers)<sup>64</sup>. There is a reference to Torah and study of *torah* on almost every page: no man is free except he who labours in the Torah. Whosoever labours in the Torah shall be exalted. He who learns from his fellow a single chapter, a single rule, a single verse, a single expression, or even a single letter, ought to honour him. . . In the opinion of Hillel an ignorant person cannot be pious and he who has acquired for himself words of Torah, has acquired for himself life in the world to come. R. Eleazar said: "Be watchful in the study of the Torah," and R. Meir said: "Lessen thy toil for worldly goods, and be busy in the Torah, and, whosoever labours in the

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<sup>61</sup> Gerald Friedlander, *op. cit.*, p. 44f.

<sup>62</sup> Montefiore and Loewe, *op. cit.*, p. XXXVII.

<sup>63</sup> *Ib.*, p. 118f.

<sup>64</sup> Singer, p. 184ff.

Torah for its own sake merits many things, and not only so, but the whole world is indebted to him. . . .”

This is the advice of the sages: a morsel of bread with salt shalt thou eat, and water by measure shalt thou drink, thou shalt sleep upon the ground and live a life of trouble the while thou toilest in the Torah. If thou doest thus, happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee<sup>65</sup>.

Study of Torah, of course, is not an end in itself, it must lead to the practice of the Law, as Simeon the son of Rabban Gamaliel said, “not study but doing is the chief thing<sup>66</sup>.” The sages taught that the object of learning is to practice: Great is the Torah which gives life to those who practice it in this world and in the world to come. . . .<sup>67</sup>.

(c) *The Law as legal code.* Rabbinic treatment of the Law springs, to a large extent, from a fundamental view regarding justice. To the Rabbis justice was a principle of greatest importance which must remain inviolate. Their concept of *mishpat* is that of equity, as Montefiore puts it: “The Rabbis do not hesitate to say that Tit-for-Tat or Measure for Measure is the greatest of the principles which underlie or govern the divine rule; it is the principle which will never pass away<sup>68</sup>.” But at the same time, they were perfectly aware that unless justice is tempered by mercy man stands little chance to be justified before his Maker. R. Elazar ben Jose, the Galilean, went so far as to say that even if 999 sins be brought against a man in the Day of Judgement, and only one good deed, God would yet pronounce in favour of the sinner; and if the sinner has none at all then God gives him some of His own<sup>69</sup>.

At the same time, though the Rabbis made provision for God’s mercy, they were insistent on the parity between crime and punishment. Montefiore in a footnote remarks: “the curiously mechanical view of human character here taken is one of the weaknesses of

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<sup>65</sup> Singer, p. 206.

<sup>66</sup> *Ib.*, p. 186.

<sup>67</sup> *Ib.*, p. 207.

<sup>68</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. XXXV.

<sup>69</sup> *Op. cit.*, *Ib.* p. 595f.

Rabbinic legalism<sup>70</sup>.” But he regards their legalism as a definite improvement upon pentateuchal law. He says: „The legalism and ceremonialism of the Rabbis are in some respects far better than the legalism and ceremonialism of the Pentateuch; they are less priestly, less primitive, freer from superstition; but they are also more pronounced, theoretic, elaborate and pervasive<sup>71</sup>.”

We have quoted Montefiore because of his balanced view and his absolute honesty. The question of rabbinic legalism is a hotly disputed subject; Jews deny it, Christians affirm it. There is, however, the fact that the Torah has been codified by the Rabbis to contain 613 *mizvot* with casuistic precision. The *Mishnah* is a code laying down precise regulations and covering “the whole range of Jewish legislation and tradition.” It comprises “the religious and ritual as well as legal and ethical elements of Judaism . . .<sup>72</sup>.” Though the *Mishnah* does not legalise opinions but discusses them and includes a variety of views, yet it serves as the basis for rabbinic legal decision and is the foundation of rabbinic law. It is not so much in the codification of legal opinion that rabbinic legalism becomes apparent as rather in the spirit in which the *torah* is approached. The Rabbis knew the distinction between “heavy” and “light” commandments of the Law and what is essential and what is less essential<sup>73</sup>. They also showed themselves greatly skilled in adapting the Law to changing circumstances and softening its harshness. The Pharisaic school introduced the principle of development within the concept of “Law” which “makes it intolerant of dogmatic definition or set credal forms<sup>74</sup>.” It is more the dependence of piety upon the *mizvot*, than the fixing of the Code, which makes for the legalistic character of rabbinism.

*Mizvah* is not just precept, it carries the overtone of meritorious deed as well. *Mizvah* is what God commands, what the rabbis defined as God’s will, and what the community of Israel practices as God’s will. The multiplicity of *mizvot* is both a sign of Israel’s

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<sup>70</sup> *Ib.*, p. 595, note.

<sup>71</sup> *Ib.*, p. XXIV.

<sup>72</sup> Valentine’s *Jewish Encycl.*

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Hag.*, 1. 8.

<sup>74</sup> H. Danby: *The Mishnah*, p. XVI.



loyalty and a token of God's favour: Rabbi Hananya b. Akashya, said: "The Holy One, blessed be he, was pleased to make Israel worthy, therefore he multiplied the Torah and the *Mizvot*<sup>75</sup>." The implication of the *mizvah* is that man is able by scrupulous observance to make his stand before God. For his guidance and encouragement the Law is thus codified and all the regulations laid down in careful detail: not only moral conduct, not only food, but how to undress, how and when to cut his nails and to examine his pockets in preparation for the Sabbath. Here is a typical injunction: "On Sabbath eve it is mandatory to wash face, hands and feet with warm water. And if possible the entire body should be bathed in warm water to be followed by immersion in a ritual bath<sup>76</sup>." All this falls under the category of *mizvah* for it is an expression of obedience and in the aggregate serves the purpose of the Torah: physical and spiritual cleanliness. In this sense the Law is a fixed code prescribing every detail of a Jew's duty to God, to man and to himself.

(d) *The Law as a way of life.* We have seen that the distinctive mark of Israel is *torah*. The importance of the Law derives from the belief that it expresses the will of God. "Conformity to God's will is the sum-total of all Jewish piety<sup>77</sup>." The intense concentration upon *doing* the will of God is the outstanding characteristic of Judaism. The pre-occupation with *torah* resulted in a specific way of life and a distinctive culture. There is a grandeur and moral beauty about Jewish social and family life. The remarkable coherence of the Jewish community; the sense of responsibility for one another; the absolute equality of all Jews; has always been the envy of Gentile observers. Particularly Jewish family life remains an example even to Christians. The purity of marriage, the love of children, the strong sense of loyalty, are not denied even by Israel's enemies. All this makes for dignity: there is a remarkable awareness among Jews of their chosenness. "Thou hast chosen us from among the nations" is a sentence which recurs again and again in the Hebrew Prayer Book. Morris Joseph, in his book:

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<sup>75</sup> Pirke Abot, I. 18.

<sup>76</sup> Gerald Friedlander, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> A Theology of Election, p. 41.

*Judaism as Creed and Life*, has a passage which conveys well the lofty tone of the Synagogue: "Life then, has been given to us for moral ends, and man is, above everything, a moral creature. Duty is the law of his being. But duty necessarily means freedom. A law can be given only to those who have the power to obey it. The fetters of obligation are unmeaning except to bind those who are free;" and he continues: " 'Keep My commandments,' the Rabbins elsewhere represent God as saying, 'and I will count it unto you as though you had created yourselves.' In the moral sense man is his own maker<sup>78</sup>."

Here then is the Jewish position: the Law of God is at the heart of Judaism. *Torah*, however, is not a fixed code, it grows and develops according to need. Man's relation to God is by means of the *mizvot*: these express God's will for man and man's response to God. But Israel's position cannot be generalized: the Law for him is his franchise and privilege. God has given the *torah* to make Israel His holy people. It would have been futile to be given the *torah* unless Israel were able to keep it. From this follows that every man can keep the Law if he wills, or as the late Dr. Stephen Wise put it: "To rise to self-conscious immortality and happiness is in man's power exclusively; it depends on no circumstances and no outer influences. Man is to all intents and purposes a free and independent being<sup>79</sup>."

## 2. *The Church and the Law of Moses*

The centre of the controversy between the Church and the Synagogue is not *torah* in the wide rabbinical sense but *torah* in the more narrow sense of pentateuchal law. Judaism is founded upon the immutability of Mosaic Law, in the words of the Maimonidian Creed:

„I believe with perfect faith that this Law (i. e. the Law of Moses) will not be changed, and that there will never be any other law from the Creator, blessed be his Name<sup>80</sup>."

<sup>78</sup> Morris Joseph: *Judaism as Creed and Life*, 1920, p. 101f.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. J. Jocz: *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, p. 270.

<sup>80</sup> Singer, p. 90.

There is an undeniable logic about this statement: if Mosaic law is God's law, it must have permanent value, otherwise God would be changeable and therefore untrustworthy. Now, the Church has never held that the Law of Moses is by other than divine origin. The curious ceremony in the Middle Ages when the Jews were required to present the Scroll of the Law to the Pope for its veneration, is a testimony to this fact. The Pope would take the Scroll and say:

“The holy Law, you Hebrew men, we praise and venerate, for through Moses' hands Almighty God gave it to your fathers. But your observance and unavailing interpretation of the Law we reject. . . .<sup>81</sup>”

Though there is a long story behind the controversy, on the whole the Church held a variety of views regarding the Law:

(1) That the Synagogue misinterpreted and misunderstood the Law.

(2) That the Law was given specifically to the Jews for their discipline.

(3) That the Law was superseded by the Gospel, which according to Barnabas is true Law. It means that the old covenant is made void in view of the New Covenant<sup>82</sup>.

This raises the important question: what was the attitude to the Law on the part of Jesus and of Paul?

There is naturally no one single answer acceptable to all. I have discussed the question in some detail in my book *A Theology of Election*.

There can be no doubt that for Jesus the Law had divine authority — it was God's Law. His quarrel with the “lawyers” was of quite a different nature. He disagreed with them on the matter of interpretation. His approach to the Law was not based upon a literalist understanding but upon spiritual insight. This comes out again and again: in the question of the Sabbath, in the question of divorce, in his association with sinners. Here the Pauline utterance: the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life

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<sup>81</sup> Franz Wasner: *The Popes' Veneration of the Torah*. The Bridge, IV, 1962, p. 275.

<sup>82</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see *A Theol. of Election*, p. 67—74.

(2 Cor. 3. 6), would have met with the fullest approval of the Master. But Jesus was not a Reformer. The peculiar authority which Jesus assumes is the most puzzling aspect of his ministry and the real cause of offence. He does not hesitate to amend the Law as in the question of *lex talionis* — the standards of the Messianic Age go beyond Mosaic legislation. We hold that here and here only lies the clue to Paul's interpretation of the Law.

For Paul, Jesus is the fulfiller of the messianic hope. The new era which has broken in with the raising of the Messiah from the dead is so unlike the past that the old values are inapplicable. The "end of the ages" has now appeared (1 Cor. 10. 11) and the new age is in the making which is under the sign of Grace. This does not mean that there is no Law, or that man is exempt from it. The Jew is still under the Law of Moses, the Greek under the law of his own conscience; the Christian has the Law written upon the tables of his heart (2 Cor. 3. 3). Paul himself is under the Law of Christ (1 Cor. 9. 21). Man is always under the Law, but the Law operates differently with believers and differently with unbelievers: whereas the latter try to please God by their works; the former only plead grace. But grace is the only answer to man's deepest need; on the basis of Law he can never be justified. That God truly offers grace and justifies sinners is sealed in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Fourth Gospel puts it in more direct language: the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1. 17). "Truth" here must be read in the context of the Covenant: God's faithfulness is established by the fulfilment of His promises.

### 3. *Law and Grace*

*Mishpat u-zedakah* — justice and mercy — are antinomies; only in God can they be kept in perfect harmony. The aim of the *torah* is to keep the balance between these two opposites. The *torah* works on the principle that God wills both justice and mercy to prevail among men, for He himself is both: righteous Judge and merciful Father. The Rabbis held that the name of Yahwe carried the meaning of pity, whereas the name Elohim signified judgement.

It is the duty of the righteous man to turn the attribute of judgement into the attribute of pity<sup>83</sup>.

There are many passages to prove that for the Rabbis *hesed* took priority over *misphat*. Their concept of God demanded that equity should go beyond the mere *shurat ha-din*, the strict letter of the Law<sup>84</sup>. For the Law itself is the expression of God's gracious concern for man, an aspect hardly ever noticed by Christian writers.

(a) *The Law as grace*. We will never appreciate the significance of the Law unless we look upon it as a token of God's special favour for his people. In this context even God's judgement is a sign of His providence expressing his determination to preserve the created order. It means that God is never in the position of an onlooker passively watching sinners trying to disrupt the moral order. On the contrary, He actively interferes in the interests of creation and it is this interference which man experiences as *mishpat*, judgement.

But the Law does not only pronounce judgement, it also provides means of restitution for wrong and helps towards reconciliation between God and man. God does not clear the guilty as if violence to the moral order did not matter, yet He does forgive iniquity, transgression and sin (Ex. 34. 7). God's wrath is never unaccountable anger, but rather moral indignation, He is not a capricious tyrant but the Supreme Guardian of all that is right, true and just.

The Law therefore can only carry a negative sign, it is Law unto death (cf. Rom. 7. 9), when it remains *mishpat* separated from *hesed*. When it is joined to *hesed* it acquires a positive sign. Man, however, can only handle the Law as *mishpat*; to balance it with *hesed* is God's prerogative. This is the Pauline position, which is the position of the O.T. as well.

The Gospel begins at the point where the Law of judgement becomes the Law of Grace by an act of God's sovereignty.

(b) *The antinomy between judgement and grace*. The ontological distinction between creature and Creator demands absolute moral values. The moment moral values become relativized the ontological difference between man and God loses its edge. Judgement

<sup>83</sup> Rabb. Anthol., p. 74.

<sup>84</sup> *Ib.*, p. 393.

and grace are therefore real antinomies, they exclude each other, if the principle of equity is to remain inviolate. There is a real, eternal division between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Man, as sinner, is therefore truly under condemnation, under judgement, under the wrath of God. Here man and God confront each other in utter separation. God is the totally Other one who demands holiness which man cannot achieve. When Morris Joseph says: "a remote God is no God," he speaks from outside the biblical context<sup>85</sup>. In the Bible God *is* the remote God, His stooping down towards man is not something that can be taken for granted. Even in His revelation He remains the Hidden One, for He is and remains the Invisible God. In the Bible revelation never means exposure but manifestation of God's mighty acts. Kierkegaard was right when he sneered: "the revealed God, poor fellow...<sup>86</sup>." God's judgement is not a divine prerogative but a divine necessity, the wages of sin is death. In the question of Law the Synagogue sees aright: Law means order, it means moral order, it means the eternal division between right and wrong.

Grace, however, is not a divine necessity but a divine prerogative. To take grace for granted is blasphemy. It means to trifle with the holiness of God and in the end leads to self-forgiveness.

The Church has frequently fallen for a simplified solution, either in the direction of Law or "works," or in the direction of grace without the Law. In Roman Catholicism we can see the emphasis of works and in Protestantism the emphasis of grace; in either case the tension is annulled. For it is not a matter of grace plus works, or works plus grace, as if the right balance were a solution. On the contrary: it is all grace and all "works;" there is no balance. The dialectic tension between grace and works is well demonstrated in the famous Pauline text: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2. 12).

The Synagogue's presence keeps us in tension between Law and Grace: the challenge to keep the Law and to live by grace is the basic problem of the believer. In view of the Cross of Jesus Christ

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Morris Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>86</sup> Walter Lowrie: Kierkegaard, p. 429.

man can do neither. That is why our strength is made perfect in weakness and the knowledge of the depth of God's mercy is the only difference between a Jew and a Christian.

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We now conclude:

Our subject was: "A theology of tension resulting from a juxtaposition of Israel and Church."

The main areas of tension we found in the doctrine of God; the doctrine of the Church and the doctrine of salvation. But in each case it was not either — or, nor was it this as well as that: Unity plus Trinity; Israel plus Church; Law plus Grace. On the contrary: in every area we detected a polarity, a bi-polar field of tension which allows of no compromise. It is human destiny to live in an area of challenge not only outside but also within the household of faith. As a Jewish writer put it: "There are no eternal truths; only an endless quest<sup>87</sup>." Only He is the Truth, the Way and the Life. It means that in the last resort, there is no abstract intellectual answer, for such an answer resolves the tension and falsifies the situation. There is only the answer of faith which dares to live in suspense. But for the presence of the Synagogue we would hardly know it. It is only in juxtaposition of Church and Synagogue that the tension reaches its climax and forces us to ask which are we: Church or Synagogue or both?

In the context of the Bible the only valid answer is in the form of an attitude and not of a definition. This can only be stated in the context of the biblical categories: the ontological distinction between Creator and creature; the moral dualism of right and wrong; the suspense of faith. These are not intellectual presuppositions but the result of an encounter with the living God in history. Such an encounter takes place at the Cross of Jesus Christ, for it is only here that man learns about the depth of God's grace.

It is only in the experience of the depth of God's grace that the believing Christian differs from the believing Jew. We would not have known it but for the fact of Israel's presence to the Church.

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<sup>87</sup> Jacob B. Agus: *Toward a philosophy of Hope*. Judaism, Spring 1960. p. 110.