

1971/3 Sept 17/1  
SEP 23 1971 Copy #2

THE TWO COVENANTS AND THE DILEMMAS OF CHRISTOLOGY

J. Coert Rylaarsdam

The dilemmas of Christology today are mostly the dilemmas of history and eschatology. If Christianity is an eschatological faith, how can it be an historical faith as well? Gerhard von Rad and many who follow him uncritically to the contrary, these two are not easily reconciled. Eschatology and history stand in a paradoxical relation to each other; no synthesis is possible. So they continue as separate foci, perpetually in tension with each other.

However Jesus may have understood his vocation, at the outset Christians interpreted his career as an eschatological event. He had overcome the world (olam), relativized history, - or even abolished it. Except for some sectarian movements, Judaism thought more historically than eschatologically; it awaited the transformation and redemption of the world. So the Jews said that the Messiah had not come. But the gentiles believed. And the Christians wrote a commentary on the Hebrew Bible and called it the New Testament. Its accent is overwhelmingly eschatological. Therefore it has now become the primary occasion for the dilemmas of Christology.

Today, after nineteen centuries, the Christian ethos has almost come full circle. Christians now want to interpret the career of Jesus mainly in historical terms; given the spirit of the culture, its meaning is more communicable that way. More and more Christians of the twentieth century have recaptured the perspective of the Judaism of the first century. More and more, the commentary that was written to announce a new world is being used to define our identity and vocation in the old. The road back from eschatology to time runs through nineteen centuries. There are some interesting milestones along the way: the postponement of the Parousia, and its demythologization; the church of Constance, and

Christendom; Saint Thomas and Aristotlean realism; Calvin, and the third use of the Law; Puritanism, and the Kingdom of God in America; process theology, and Teilhard de Chardin; the Second Vatican Council, and aggiornamento. The movement is all in one direction, and so relentless that it seems to gobble up the very witness made to stay its course; consider the reaction to Karl Barth in the so-called "death of God" movement as a recent example.

Nevertheless, the tension continues. Given the paradoxical relation between history and eschatology, there is no reason to suppose that what neither Judaism nor Christianity accomplished in the first century will happen in the twentieth. Eschatology did not absorb history; and the historical did not dissolve the eschatological. Nor has a final synthesis ever been found for both. Especially in Christianity, where the temporal and historical has now reasserted itself, the prestige and status of the New Testament is alone sufficient to insure a swing of the pendulum. In the meantime, however, its overwhelmingly apocalyptic and eschatological perspective, coupled with traditional notions about its authority both within and outside the Bible, greatly complicates the contemporary dilemmas of Christology. To what extent and how should current christologies be controlled by the eschatological christologies of the New Testament? Does the New Testament really frustrate the intentions of men like Pannenberg and Moltmann? And, in turn, do their formally traditional views about its authority really obscure its true function? When such questions begin to be asked a systematic theologian usually moves forward, into Christian tradition. But an Old Testament theologian moves backward, into the Bible from which the New Testament sprang. He asks about the paradox of

the historical and the trans-historical in the Hebrew Bible; and he asks about the handling of it in the most influential commentary ever written, not only on the Hebrew Bible but probably also on all other sacred books.

## I

In the Jewish Scriptures the paradox is given the shape of covenants. The Old Testament revolves around two covenants, not one: a covenant with Israel, a covenant with David.<sup>2</sup> These two covenants probable each had a relatively separate and independant history of its own at the beginning. Each spoke in its own way about God's revelation of himself, about his relation to the world, and to Israel. So both nurtured their own distinctive and relatively independent religious, social, and cultic traditions and institutions. Each had its characteristic themes, such as "the people of God" and "the Messiah," which eventually became a part of the common legacy of Israel. But, because each covenant had its own distinct perspectives, such themes often stood in some degree of tension with each other. This has continued down to the present, in both Judaism and Christianity. In Israel, the covenant with David was accommodated to the covenant with the people but never wholly absorbed by it. In the New Testament the covenant with David was resurgent; but, again, not in such a way as to assimilate the other covenant entirely. The New Testament also revolves around the two covenants around which the Old revolves, though the proportional significance is reversed. At the bottom of the separation of Christianity from Judaism lay this tension between the two covenants.

---

<sup>2</sup>The covenant with Abraham plays no independent formative role in the formation of Old Testament traditions; it simply pushes back the inception of the covenant with Israel to the period of the patriarchs. However, in the New Testament and in the history of Christian interpretation, as well as in post-canonical Judaism, it is endowed with a primary significance and status. In this development the Christians often set it over against the covenant with Israel which is then associated with Moses and the Law.

The covenant with Israel was the older of the two. It was the berith, the agreement, by which Israel described its relation to Yahweh in the period before the monarchy. Thus it was the covenant of a religious confederacy of tribal groups that defined itself as a single corporate social and religious union called into being and protected by the one God to whom it vowed allegiance. It interpreted its history as the action of God in its behalf; and its continuing existence depended both on the on-going presence of Yahweh in Israel's life and on her faithfulness to him. With minor exceptions, the whole of the Pentateuch presupposes only this confederacy covenant.

On the basis of accounts such as are found in Joshua twenty four it seems clear that the central cultic action of pre-monarchic Israel consisted of what was probably an annual ceremony of "Covenant Renewal" at which the communal relationship to Yahweh was celebrated and reconfirmed. It is by now a matter of common knowledge that the forms for this cultic action that represented the relation between Yahweh and Israel were derived from a Hittite "suzerain ceremony" in which the great king entered into a permanent treaty relationship with a petty client he had rescued.

The beginning of the covenant lay in the initiating action of Yahweh. The account in Joshua (24:2-13) opens with a scene in which Yahweh, as the great suzerain, recalls some of the episodes in Israel's history in which, though not obligated to do so, he had come to her rescue: the preservation of the patriarchs, the deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of sea and wilderness, and the conquest of the land. The continuance of the relationship with this "saving" God depends on mutual obligations of faithfulness and responsibility: the conditions are progressively spelled out and are a

matrix for Israel's laws; warnings and exhortations are issued; solemn oaths are taken; and sacrifices seal the covenant. As in the case of the suzerain treaties, the agreement is not one between equals; Israel is indebted before she enters into it, for the saving action of Yahweh that makes the covenant possible was an uncovenanted mercy. Nevertheless, the realization of the promises of the covenant - the life and security of Israel in its land as the sign and means of God's promise of blessing for all mankind - is dependent upon Israel's responsibility.

Recent form criticism and biblical theology have made much of the so called "recital" aspect of this covenant ritual; that is, of that part which remembers the great saving acts of Yahweh that preceded the agreement and that make it possible. G. von Rad found this recital form in Dt. 26:5-10, where the great saving acts are recited not by Yahweh, as in the ceremonial of covenant renewal, but as a confession of an Israelite farmer when he comes to present the offering for his new crop. Von Rad's imagination was enthralled by the "evangelical" impulse of the recital; he called it a "Credo" and suggested that the entire Pentateuch might have developed as an expansion of the recital motif. He also noted that the giving of the Law on Sinai was not included among the list of saving acts in the recital.<sup>3</sup>

Von Rad thought and wrote in that way before the role of recital as one aspect of the covenant renewal ceremony had been fully grasped. The reconstruction of the covenant renewal rites as a total complex, show how divine initiative and saving action and Israel's responsibility are bound together in the Confederacy covenant. For their continuing effectiveness,

---

<sup>3</sup>See, especially, the first essay in The Problem of the Hexateuch . . . (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1966).

all parts of the agreement depend on one another; none has meaning except in the context of all the others. Hence, for example, in Exodus 20:1, the declarative "recital" to introduce the Decalogue: "I am the LORD thy God that brought thee out of the house of bondage . . ." is bound to the imperatives that follow. The covenant renewal ceremony was, indeed, a matrix for evangelical recital in Israel's traditions; but it was simultaneously, as noted already, also the matrix for the legal forms that defined Israel's responsibility. Insofar as the Pentateuch is the product of the celebration of the covenant of the Confederacy in Israel it is both proclamation and instruction, for in this covenant Gospel and Law are integral aspects of a single whole. The omission of Sinai from the list of saving events recited, noted by von Rad, can perhaps best be accounted for by remembering that the rite of covenant renewal, both as Gospel and Law, represents Sinai.

This close proximity of grace and demand in a single agreement that marks the Covenant of Yahweh with Israel in the Confederacy contains inherently paradoxical dimensions. Therefore, what Israel had stated synthetically could, potentially, be stated antithetically as well. This is precisely what happened to this covenant in many parts of the New Testament, especially in the writings of St. Paul. For him the motif of obligation had crowded out that of recital. Yahweh's covenant with Israel was deprived of the great saving acts of God on which it rested. Its demands were treated not as a response, but as an abstract absolute. In the New Testament the saving events recited in the Covenant of the Confederacy tend to serve as a preface for the action of God in the career of Jesus Christ, though, actually, as we shall see, the interpretation of Jesus Christ really depended more basically on the other covenant, the covenant with David.



Before dealing with that we must take a brief look at some of the themes for biblical faith provided by the earlier of the two covenants. Virtually all of these are related to the fact that for this covenant the created world of time, space, and matter, and, most especially, the world of man and history is really the only world that matters. It bears witness to Yahweh and to his relation to men in terms of what he does in this scene. There is no concern with the transcendent in a supernatural or mythical sense; and cosmological interests are minimal. Even the accounts of creation under the inspiration of this covenant are given the form of histories. One finds scant allusion to God in his hiddenness and mystery; what counts most is the decisiveness of his presence in the world of human action; he makes himself known in historical events.

The locus of this historical revelation is limited. For while Yahweh presumably is God of all mankind his revelation in this is preponderantly in Israel's history alone. The great saving actions are events in that history. There is none of the preoccupation with "the nations: and their destiny as objects of God's interest or as actors in a divine drama, such as one meets in the books of the prophets."<sup>4</sup> The God of this covenant is called the God "of our fathers," and his preoccupation with other nations, whether Egyptians or Moabites, is always incidental to his concern for Israel. The accent is on particularity: the election of Israel as the people in whose history Yahweh reveals himself.

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Isaiah 10:5ff.; Jeremiah 27; and, in a more redemptive sense, the role of Cyrus in Second Isaiah (45:1ff.). Consider also the famous "sermon" of Amos against the nations that surround Israel and the "Prophecies Against the Nations" in several of the prophetic books.

Israel told her history as a story punctuated by acts of divine rescue. Scholars have called this recital Salvation History. Yahweh always provided a "way," not only in the great historical events of the beginning of the people and its land on which the covenant rested, but also in its subsequent history when the crisis was often occasioned by its own faithlessness or disobedience. Thus, in this covenant, the direction is always towards the future. History begins with a promise, the history of Israel especially. The promise encounters a crisis from which Yahweh provides rescue, to make possible its fulfilment. Whether in the barrenness of Sarah, the oppression of the Pharaoh, or the lack of water in the wilderness, the surmounting of each crisis constitutes a salvation. Nevertheless, every "already" is superseded by a "not yet." The movement is forward; but, because both the beginning and end lie in the temporal order, there is no visible end to the series. The Alpha and the Omega play no role in this covenant with Israel. It is open.

The term "salvation" carries very definitive and absolute connotations in Christian tradition. Therefore its application to the historical and relative events in which Israel's covenant celebrated Yahweh's revelation and redemption can be misleading. The saving act of Yahweh was completely adequate and utterly decisive to meet the crisis that was its occasion. That was its finality. But, as the very etymology of the divine name seems to show, Israel, in this covenant, did not pretend to know deity in any unchanging sense, as an absolute. The Confederacy covenant makes no appeal to the hidden mystery of deity, whether as Creator or as Redeemer. Salvation in this covenant means something quite different than it does



in either the covenant of David or in the Christian tradition; it is simply the reconfirmation of a promise, repeated ever anew.

Beginning in the New Testament Christian interpreters of the Old Testament who work with Salvation History as a sort of master key by which to grasp its meaning for their own faith sometimes add the event Jesus Christ to the series of great acts of God recited in Israel's covenant renewal celebrations. But the viability of this procedure seems much more apparent than real. In the New Testament, with very limited and partial exceptions, the career of Jesus Christ constitutes an eschatological event. It discloses the Alpha and the Omega. To be sure, the event has its historical side; "born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4); but what is distinctive about it is that it marks the end to that sort of historical contingency.<sup>5</sup> Here again, it was the Covenant with David, rather than the Covenant of the Confederacy that served the Christians who wrote the New Testament. The latter could, presumably, contain and give meaning to the career of Jesus at a moment of fulfilment analogous to the exodus or the return from the exile. It could define it as a transforming event in history of a decisive sort. But it could not define it as the event that summed up history, or brought it to its destiny. And that, precisely, would seem to distinguish the Christ event in Christian tradition from the events of Salvation History. Salvation History is not the key to New Testament christology.

---

<sup>5</sup> Thus the genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels, together with his circumcision, perform the function of indicating that both reach their fulfilment in him and henceforth cease to have meaning outside of him.

It would be difficult to overstate the historical relativism of the Confederacy Covenant. The action of God begins in time and in the human scene, and it never extends beyond them. The SHALOM which marks the goal of God's plan and of Israel's mission lies within the world of man's experience. From the beginning to end, spirit and matter are inextricably held together; the order of redemption is coterminous with the order of creation. Though the living God in his mystery may extend beyond time, his presence in it is what matters. There are no eschatological intimations in this primary covenant of the Hebrew tradition; for, properly understood, the eschatological alludes to an absolute that lies beyond the relativities of time and history, and to any goal bound up with them. However greatly this primary covenant of the Old Testament may appeal to much in modern Christian experience, the Christians who produced the New Testament did not treat it as the most important biblical source for their christology. That they found in the Covenant of David, the secondary covenant of the Hebrew Bible.

## II

The second pivot around which the traditions of Israel and its Scriptures revolve is the Covenant of David - or with David. It attests the role given to the throne and dynasty of David and to Mount Zion and the worship there as the "signs" and means of divine revelation. We have seen that for the Covenant of the Confederacy, the definitive revelation of Yahweh was provided by means of a series of epochal events that together summed up the story of Israel's formation as a people and its inheritance of its land. Land and people were the signs of the LORD's presence in the world, the marks of his

grace, and the basis for hope. It was a revelation that began in history and that anticipated a fulfilment in history.

David took over the sacred mountain of Zion and made it the most holy place for Israel's worship. When his own royal status and the perpetuation of his dynasty began to be treated as signs of the divine presence and the manner of it, this constituted a radical break with the past, and a radically new beginning in the religious confessions of Israel. As "events" of revelation Zion and David were truly novelties. They introduced a tension into the traditions of Israel's faith that has never been completely overcome. In Israel the covenant with David remained secondary, though eventually its characteristic motifs touched the whole tradition. The Davidic covenant precipitated the political division into two kingdoms; but eventually it accommodated itself to the older covenant of Israel. As we shall see, it was in large measure transformed by it, but never absorbed.

The primary materials relating to the Confederacy covenant, before it was affected by the Covenant of David, are located mostly in the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua. It is my conviction that scholarship has now located equally primary sources for our interpretation of the Davidic covenant in its original distinctiveness.<sup>6</sup> The fifth chapter of Second Samuel reports how David captured Jerusalem without a battle. The sixth chapter tells how he brought Israel's most venerable cultic object to Mount Zion; and in the seventh chapter we have the oath to David presented as a prophetic oracle mediated by Nathan. The story surrounding it makes clear that the dynasty of David,

---

<sup>6</sup>Martin Noth's Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967), represents the basic resource for the materials embedded in the "Deuteronomic History."

rather than the temple, - the house that is David's family rather than the house Solomon built - provides the inner core of the Zion faith.

It is not at all improbable that David perpetuated a modified form of the worship and the priesthood that was established on Zion centuries before Israel's presence there. Here the Ugaritic materials, which give us a look into the religious scene in Canaan, and the strange account in Genesis fourteen of the priest-king Melchizedek who blessed Abram, serve to interpret each other. Melchizedek was king of Salem. His name reads "My King is Zedek (Rightness).". King, of course, is a title for the deity; and, significantly, it is a title that never occurs in the traditions of the older covenant, only in those of David. Melchizedek was "priest of El elyon," of "God most high." El was the "high" god of the Canaanite pantheon, above Anath, his erstwhile spouse, and Aleyn Ba'al, their dying-rising son. The cult of Zion, before David captured it, seems to have featured El, the Creator of the cosmos and the ruler of nations. One of his names there in addition to his title "most high," was Zedek, which is also carried in Melchizedek's name. It alludes to the true cosmic order maintained by the creator and ruler of nature and the nations.

David did at least two things to make this ancient cult on Zion an Israelite cult: he introduced the name of Israel's God, Yahweh, and reduced all other proper names to attributes. King became a favorite title now for Yahweh; and there arose the aetiological story of how all of this had been anticipated by Melchizedek in the days of Abram.

In addition to the name of Yahweh, David brought the ark to Zion. Under the old covenant of the Confederacy this sacred object had been the most conspicuous reminder and embodiment of the presence of Yahweh in the

life of the whole family of Israel. It led the people through the wilderness and on pilgrimage. In battle it reminded them that Yahweh fought Israel's battles. And in some accounts of the covenant renewal ceremony it stood at the center of the solemnities, to remind the people that Yahweh heard the pledges of loyalty to which they were recommitting themselves. Now, in the Covenant of David, this sacred ark, to which all Israel had deep emotional ties, announced that Yahweh reigned as King on Zion, his holy mountain, maintaining the "righteous" or cosmic order of his creation and exercising authority and rule over "the nations." Here on Zion Yahweh had established his throne; and seated on the throne at his right hand was his anointed, the ruler of the house of David.

In addition to the primary materials of the Davidic covenant noted above we must also cite the large number of psalms that belong to this classification.<sup>7</sup> Psalms that tell about Yahweh the Creator who establishes the mountains and walks on the deeps, or who makes the earth shake with his thundering. Psalms about his ascent to Mount Zion, accompanied by a great battle shout, to take his seat and assume his reign there. Psalms about the day of the LORD on which he comes to judge the world. Psalms about the holy mountain itself: its mystic beauty, its inviolability as the seat of the great God, its access to the mysterious waters of life, its centrality of all directions of the compass, and its temple, the house in which Yahweh is enthroned. And psalms about the king who reigns by Yahweh's decree, to whom he is related as son to father in a relationship that is

---

<sup>7</sup>Sigmund Mowinckel's The Psalms in Israel's Worship. . . Two Volumes (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), epitomizes pioneer research in this area.

antecedent to all history, and is not subject to human contingency: Yahweh's regent, his first-born son, the priest and shepherd of his people, the mediator by which the life and power of God is made available to man.

There has been much debate in the academic world about the rites on Zion, especially the rites marking the beginning of a new year. Did they correspond to the rites of the Babylonian Akitu festival? How closely? Was Yahweh annually re-enthroned as King on Zion, and what role did the ark play in this? In what ways and to what extent did the rites of sacral kingship associated with Babylon have equivalents in Jerusalem at New Year's. It is impossible to probe such questions here; nor is that necessary. For what all of the primary material of the Davidic covenant makes quite evident is that this covenant did not feature the renewal ceremonies described in our review of the older covenant. Though it remains hazardous to speak with assurance of what transpired in every respect in the cult on Zion, it is not too difficult to ascertain some of the things that did not occur there.

As reflected in its primary sources, in the cult on Zion the people did not enter into an agreement with Yahweh; they were not asked to. There is no recital of the great acts of God that made Israel a people and gave her its land; indeed, except for the personal stories of David, there is scant reference to history of any sort. There are no solemn mutual undertakings between Yshweh and man, no recital of conditions that must be observed, no warning against human aberrations by which man might forfeit the promises made to him. There is no Law in the economy of redemption. It was only later, in secondary materials in which the Davidic Covenant is



being qualified by the legacy of the Confederacy, that the promise of the divine oath to the king is made conditional upon his moral responsibility (e.g., I Kings 3:10-15). Also, the particularity of election, represented by the focus on Israel and its land in the Covenant of the Confederacy, is largely lacking in this messianic covenant. It is displaced by the universality of creation and the nations. And instead of the communalism of confederacy there is individualism. The King displaces the people as son of Yahweh.

Our review of the features of the Confederacy Covenant that are lacking in the materials of the Zion cult sets in relief the characteristic themes of the Covenant of David. In whatever rites they may have been celebrated, they stand in sharp contrast to the themes of the older covenant.

In the Confederacy the historical was central, especially the history of Israel. In Genesis the creation stories serve mainly as a means of getting into the world of man. That is where the action is. But in the psalms we have cited, as well as in closely affiliated materials in both wisdom and the prophets, the testimony to creation is for its own sake. The real center of action, in the Covenant of David, lies in the primordial, the cosmic, and the pre-temporal world that antedates the world of human contingency. Its psalms sing about the triumph of God as Creator by recalling his establishment of order (zedek) by the overcoming of chaos and anarchy in struggles that lie in that mythical past. Yahweh's Kingship, and the Davidic kingship as well, rests on a series of decrees which are eternal and unchangeable: the world is established; it will not be moved. Yahweh is King forever; mightier than the breakers of the many waters. He decrees the place of the nations in the scheme of things; and by that same immutable decree David is his first-born. He has set his right hand over the sea and the rivers, a token which co-ordinates

his kingship and rule with that of Yahweh himself. The focus is on the Alpha of the beginning; and the psalms repeatedly appeal to this mē az, this primordial illo tempore, as the rock of assurance amid the instabilities of time and history.

Whereas the Covenant celebrated at Shechem faced the future and anticipated that the on-going sequence of promise-fulfilment would lead to the SHALOM that lay ahead, the Davidic covenant celebrated the Alpha of the primordial past, for the sake of making it available and effective in the present. It "remembered;" to reiterate or to re-effect: the primordial and the absolute for the sake of security amidst the temporal and the contingent of history. We are here clearly looking at the source of many characteristic Christian Theological and liturgical motifs.

In the older covenant the revelation of God took place in history; in the Davidic covenant it took place in the primordial past of Creation. The former anticipated the future; the latter invoked the absolutes of a primordial past. Though there was great inequality in the partners, the covenant of the Confederacy was bi-lateral. There were reciprocal pledges, mutual undertakings, and the continuing proliferation of human responsibilities. In contrast, the Davidic Covenant was unilateral. It was a divine decree, an oath taken by Yahweh. God does not dwell in the midst of his people, in his land; he dwells on Zion. The chasm between man and God is bridged only by the mystical figure of the Anointed who, by the mystery of the divine decree, is both human and divine. The responsibility and freedom of human volition associated with the older covenant, and exemplified by Torah, is obscured in the Covenant of David.

By looking at the primary materials pertinent to each of the two covenants that lie at the heart of the Old Testament we have become aware how profoundly they differ from each other. We can summarize the differences under three headings: The absolute and primordial over against the contingent and historical; the orientation to the past versus the orientation to the future; and a decreed divine determinism in tension with assumptions of human freedom and responsibility. These contrasts contain tensions of paradoxical dimensions that defy complete resolution. The story of the development of Israel's traditions, including that of the production of the Hebrew Bible, can be told best as the story of the interaction between these two covenants as both became parts of the heritage of the entire community and as both served as resources for the interpretation of its faith, century after century. In this way the paradoxical character of the tension between the two seems to have taken root in Israel's consciousness, eventually to explode in the Roman era in a variety of movements and sects. Most important among all of these was the new eschatological faith of Christianity which, in due course, again combined these same two covenants, together with their reciprocal tensions and paradoxes, as the double focus of one faith. What made this new faith distinctive from the faith of Israel, which had also combined them, was that it reversed the order of priority assigned to the covenants. Whereas in Israel the Covenant of David is made subservient to the Covenant of the Confederacy, in Christianity the opposite is the case. We must look at the story of the development that helps us to understand that reversal.

The older covenant of Israel was futuristic and historical. Its tendency to dominate the Davidic covenant in the shaping of Israelite traditions is indicated by the fact that these themes are increasingly ascendent. The themes of the primordial actions of Yahweh as creator and king are transposed into the world of time and history. His universal assertion of his authority is relocated in the world of human events and begins to serve as the basis for anticipating events of judgement and redemption in the future. This recasting of some of the great themes of the Davidic covenant under the impact of the perspective of the covenant of the Confederacy is most conspicuously discernible in the canonical books that are the special legacy of the great prophetic movement. We may recall that Martin Buber, in his book, The Prophetic Faith, gave the title "The Turning to the Future," to his chapter dedicated to the canonical prophets. The title is a tribute to the role the prophets played in reorienting the themes of the Covenant of David to the perspective of the Covenant of the Confederacy.

Most of the prophetic books are palpably deeply under the impact of the Zion cult and its themes. The entire Book of Isaiah, for example is permeated by Zion themes: Yahweh is enthroned on Zion; he commits his reign to his Messiah of the house of David; his rule is universal, extending to the ends of the earth, over nature and nations. One recalls the balancing of the universality of redemption with the universality of creation in chapters forty to fifty five of the book, and also the tenacity with which the original Isaiah adhered to the theme of the inviolability of Zion. The Book of Amos opens with the announcement that "the LORD roars from Zion." And in Micha one can almost see the erstwhile securities of the Davidic covenant crumble as the prophet relocates the power of the primordial absolute of Yahweh in

the historical scene in which he measures his judgements by man's moral irresponsibility.

The kingship of Yahweh and the universality of his rule over the nations become permanently embedded in the prophetic corpus. The series of "Prophecies against the Nations," found in several prophetic books are a novelty of the prophets probably inspired by the universality of the Davidic covenant. But the static notions of eternal decrees, reconfirmed in annual cultic celebrations by which Yahweh keeps the nations in their appointed sphere, makes way for the daring notion that the rise and fall of political powers in history is entirely at the discretion of the divine will, however obtuse it may appear. That is, the theme of the universality that comes from Zion is set in the historical perspective that is provided by the other covenant. Recall Jeremiah's interpretation of the rise of Babylonia as a new world empire (Jeremiah 27-29); and also the annointed role of the conquering Cyrus in Second Isaiah. The primordial has become historical, though it has remained universal.

No change effected by the reaction of the two covenants upon each other was to be more fateful for the future than Amos's historification of the "Day of the LORD." Though Amos assumed the centrality of Zion as the divine seat, he nevertheless demythologized what was probably the central feature of its cult. Mythologically the Day of the LORD was the day of creation, the primeval day of the triumph and reign of Yahweh. Cultically it was the day on which this triumph was renewed and revitalized: the order of nature was restored, its fruitfulness insured, and nations were reassigned to their proper place. It was a day of light. But at Bethel Amos proclaimed that it would be a day of darkness. That is, mythologically speaking,

creation would be undone and chaos would return in both nature and politics. Of course, Amos was no longer speaking mythologically but historically. Amos was a child of both covenants and is oppressed by the conviction that Israel has been unfaithful to its covenanted obligations. The mutuality of the older covenant, in which men can forfeit their redemption through neglect of their responsibility, had for him won out over the unilateral oath of the covenant of David. Simultaneously, he divorces the Day of the LORD from its cyclical, cultic context and projects it into an open and historical future. The day had not only become a day of judgement, but also an unpredictable future day, no longer bound to time or place. The Day of Judgement has had a long and varied career in Christian tradition. Amos only provided the first new stage of this. But his mark on it has never been undone.

In the story of the meeting of the two covenants the so-called reformation of King Josiah must count as a major reassertion of the perspective of the Confederacy covenant. The king and the reformers sought to protect the status of the Davidic dynasty and of Zion and its temple by giving them a setting in the historically and communally oriented traditions of Shechem. Thus there was a final elimination of cult rites and objects that spoke to the religious mythologies that lay in the background of the royal cult: the tree and the pillar, the brazen serpent, the chariots of the sun, the kedeshim and the kedeshoth, the "vessels" used in the worship of Ba'al and Asherah, the rites of Tammuz, and Topheth. And the introduction of the ceremony of covenant renewal, with a reading of the conditions provided by the Book of the Law, reintroduces the element of volitional moral responsibility. There is communal participation, and the king is bound by the moral demands. We are told that the rites concluded with an observance of the Passover such



as had not occurred since the days of the judges (II Kings 23:21-23). The Passover, of course, carried with it the relocation of revelation in the history of Israel, in the events that made it a people with a land. Thus particularity and historical election now match universality and the absolute of the oath; and Israel, as well as its king, is the son of its God (Hosea 11:1).

For the sake of the survival of Israel, the powerful drive of the old communal covenant in the restatement of faith represented by the Reformation of King Josiah came at a very opportune time. A generation later Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Kingdom of Judah, razed the holy hill of Zion where Yahweh had resided, and took his vicar to Babylon as a captive. In terms of the perspective of the Davidic Covenant according to its original and unqualified assumptions, Marduk had triumphed over Yahweh. Israel should have ceased to exist; its name should have disappeared, along with the name of Yahweh. That was the political and social pattern in the ancient Near East where the polities were controlled by the mythology that lay in the background of the traditions of the covenant of David. The fact that Israel retained its identity in exile indicates how far the redefinition of this covenant had gone and how subsidiary it had become to the Covenant of the Confederacy.

The God who had ruled on Zion was able to go into captivity with his people; and, though in exile, they had no doubt that he was still the creator and King of the nations. Review the prophetic books, and the Book of Daniel. The role of place, absolutized in the Davidic cultus, had been relativized. It had not been abolished. When he prayed in Babylonia Daniel turned his face to Jerusalem; and to this day in every good Jewish home there is a

marker on the wall that faces Zion. Nevertheless, the process of what may be called the "etherealization" of Zion and its messiah had begun. And though, with the rise of Christianity, the themes of the Covenant of David were powerfully resurgent, this process became persistent.

The mobility of Yahweh, which made it possible for him to go into exile, was rooted in the older covenant. So were the historical particularity and communalism of Israel which now reasserted themselves as the means for her survival. In Babylonia circumcision, sabbath, and diet first became systematically established as signs of the distinctiveness and vocation of Israel. There, too, the teaching and interpretation of the conditions relating to the covenant of salvation history first became the central cultic activity of the community. And, with the partial exception of the ascendancy of the Aaronic priesthood and the sacrificial liturgies of the Second Temple, this preoccupation with Torah has continued until this day as the hallmark of the dominant expression of Israel's faith.

Though for a moment, on the practical level, the old covenant of Israel seemed to carry all before it, the Covenant of David also persisted. The dominant focus was unable to absorb it; the relation between the two is too paradoxical for that. Even when it seemed to disappear, the Davidic Covenant only went underground. Gershom Sholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism is really a documentation of this persistent habit which has lasted over two thousand years. Apocalypticism was the first fruit of this underground vitality.

In the post-exilic world of Israel the formulae for theodicy prescribed by the ethically responsible Covenant of Israel were not vindicated in the arena of historical actuality on which this covenant insisted. This gave an

opening for the old primordial themes of creation and chaos, of the day of the Lord, and of a messiah who would exercise a universal reign. We have seen that these themes had already been brought into the historical scene; Amos had reinterpreted the Day of the Lord as a day of historical judgement on Israel. But in captivity Israel had acknowledged its guilt and repented. It began to hope and pray for its restoration. Its prayers were heard. Then it began to wait for the great historical assize in which the tables would be turned, so that the powers that had served so arrogantly as the instruments of her degradation might themselves be brought to judgment, and so that the reign of the messiah might begin and establish the peace of primeval paradise on earth in the shape of a human society.

This anticipated historical reversal, rooted in a reading of the historicized themes of the Davidic covenant did not occur. Empire succeeded empire, each more wicked than its predecessor; and Israel's situation in history was ever more precarious. God did not vindicate himself; history was not following the script. Now the trans-historical dimensions of the old Davidic Covenant began to reassert themselves. God had left the world, for a time. He would return, in the future, soon, to execute the judgements of the Day of the Lord. We note that the futurism remains; the Alpha is beginning to point to an Omega.

Though in apocalypticism the history-transcending mystery reappears, the world of time and men remains the scene of the cosmic drama. For the moment that world has fallen prey to the forces of chaos. The nations are in the grip of wicked hierarchies of evil that have the old chaos dragon, Satan, at their head. God was not active in the world now, but he was preparing for action here. He would not act by means of historical powers, as he did

in the thinking of the old historically oriented covenant, but by means of his own supernatural agents: the Son of Man, Michael, the arch-angel, the heaven-ascended Elijah, and the Messiah, who is now given the full measure of his primordial divine dignity. God is coming to destroy the forces of chaos, to destroy the nations in their grip, to cleanse the whole earth, and to inaugurate a new creation that has no end. For this coming Israel must wait, be faithful, and endure martyrdom. The analogy to the story of the Exodus is clear; but the difference is more significant. And, of course, there is the analogy with the action of God in the Christian story; what apocalypticism anticipates as imminent is there said to have happened; or, to be more precise, to be in the process of happening.

The Christians who wrote the New Testament were a Christian sect. They were sectarian because they took such a one-sided view of the relation of the two covenants to one another. For a moment they forgot about the paradoxical character of the relationship; and they thought that the full meaning of the historical could be fitted into the perspective of the eschatological, without remainder. They quickly began to discover that they were wrong; and the story of nineteen centuries of Christian history can be told as the story of the progressive discovery, exploration, and rectification of that initial mistake. Their retention of the Hebrew Bible has served the Christians well in this matter. They have thought and said that they retained it as the sign of a praeparatio; but, in fact, it served as the source of their recovery of the knowledge of foundations that are enduring because they are paradoxical.

There are, indeed, two covenants in the Christian Bible. They are not the two covenants called Testaments, placed *seriatim*; the former in

Hebrew, the latter in Greek. They are the two covenants that run through both the Old and New Testaments, the same throughout the entire Bible.

If all of this is so, it follows that the nature of the relationship between the two faiths is radically different from all traditional Christian statements of it. If both Judaism and Christianity always continue to revolve around the same two covenants that are paradoxically related to one another, then their relationship, whatever its tensions, is forever mutually interdependent; and their separation from each other is rooted in the paradoxical character of the interrelationship of the two covenants in which both participate. If that be the case, there is a basis for dialogue, something not located hitherto. Within each, from one period to the next, and between the two faiths in every period there is then one question that will always be in season: How are (were) we (or they) dealing with the paradox of the two covenants?

J. Coert Rylaarsdam