

THE PROBLEM OF A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF THE PEOPLE ISRAEL

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I wish to propose a definition of a non-existent discipline, which I shall call a Christian theology of the people Israel, and explore whether it should exist. As a matter of fact, I believe it should, but there are major difficulties lying in the way of its development. As a means of encouraging others to join in the task, I shall discuss and attempt to meet the difficulties, at least in a preliminary way. The full development of the topic, as also of the definition, is the subject for a book, on which I am presently working.

A Christian theology of the people Israel would be the integration, on central Christian grounds, of the teachings of Judaism into the subject matter of comprehensive, systematic Christian reflection. As an integral part of the church's self-critical and constructive obligation, it would address the question of the church's duty and ability to hear the testimony of the Jewish people to God, including their denial of Christian claims concerning Jesus Christ. Such an undertaking would therefore be neither a report on Jewish faith and theology, nor a Jewish theology, but a Christian inquiry concerning what the God and Father of Jesus Christ is saying to the church in the witness of the Jewish people.

The definition depends upon a conception of theology as a self-critical and constructive obligation that is laid upon the church. Since the church has a Lord and exists because God has called it by his Spirit to his service through Jesus Christ, it is responsible to God for its words and acts. The church therefore needs constantly to ask itself about its walking and talking, whether it is being attentive and responsive to the leading of its Lord. The penultimate criterion for this task of self-examination and correction is the Bible, in the only way in which the church has ever had the Bible, namely, as the interpreted Bible, listened to in the hope that it will prove once more to be the means of hearing its Lord who is

the ultimate criterion of the rightness or wrongness of the church's movement through history.

Theology so conceived is an act of faith and its risk is the risk of faith. It is a part and in the service of a movement which we trust, but can never know for sure, to be the response that God asks of his church here and now. In this risk, then, we ask about a Christian theology of the people Israel. We ask, coram Deo and as his Gentile church, whether we should say something among ourselves about his people Israel, whom we know as our Jewish neighbors in this world.

Other aspects of the definition could be clarified or discussed, but first I wish to consider some objections to this preposterous proposal of incorporating and integrating Jewish teaching into Christian theology. Is the church supposed to listen to the Jewish people? Can we seriously entertain the thought that the God and Father of Jesus Christ might have something to say to the church through the witness of the Jews, seeing that they have consistently rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ? And is this to be worked out on central Christian lines, that is, not as another fad or heresy, but as part of the orthodox, catholic theology of the ecclesia, semper reformanda? Let us consider the reasons against my proposal.

The first difficulty with the attempt to reflect positively among ourselves on the Jewish people is that there are almost no precedents in our conversations from the past eighteen centuries for doing so. Some today are discovering a fresh way of listening to the Apostolic authors, especially to Paul, to detect there the beginnings of a positive and respectful way of speaking of continuing post Christum Israel, but this is a new discovery. Whether they be right or wrong in this new reading of Paul, it is surely new, for from the second until well into the twentieth century, Christian talk about the Jewish people has been almost entirely negative.

In his Israel und die Kirche (1980), the German theologian B. Klappert has summed up the possibilities from the past which are alive in the writings of recent

and contemporary German theologians. He lists five possibilities, and all of them result in the conclusion that Israel has lost its special character as the elect people of God: 1) Israel is simply replaced by the church; 2) the remnant of Israel has been integrated (by conversion) into the church; ^{*} 4) Israel is the exemplary negative foil of the church; and 5) Israel has no special character since Christ, being only part of the mass of humanity standing in need of justification.

(It should be noted that Klappert then proceeds to develop a model which he argues would assure for Christian theology a proper affirmation of Israel's continuing election. He calls this a "dependent-participatory" model: Gentile Christians are dependent on the election of Israel, and on the fulfillment of the election of all Israel in Jesus Christ; and through Christ, they participate in the history of the election of and the promises to Israel. To this we respond by pointing out that the election of Israel became historical in the covenant, and life in the covenant means faithfulness to Torah. Is this Torah-living something in which Gentile Christians are to participate, or is Israel's election abstracted in Klappert's model from Torah, perhaps because Torah has been fulfilled in Christ? Moreover, the center of that covenant contains the promise of the Land. Are Gentile Christians heirs to that promise too? How? If Klappert's proposal sounds somewhat abstract, it should be remembered that German theologians working on this problem are in historical fact working in abstraction: Israel has ceased to be concrete for them as Jewish colleagues, students and neighbors.)

A serious handicap to developing a positive Christian theology of the Jewish people is that we have never had one, that our evaluation of the Jews has been consistently negative, and that consequently, we would have to proceed without any guidelines from the past. We would have no help from the Fathers of the church, from its great medieval theologians, from its Reformers, or from any other voices at all until we come to the few who are working on the problem today.

* 3) Israel is only the type of the church;

A second difficulty that stands in the way is the proper hesitation we should feel about developing theologies about other people. Theology is basically an activity of the church and for the church. In Christian theology Christians have addressed themselves, by and large, to themselves and to their own apprehension of how God has dealt with them, what he is doing for them, and how they should respond to him. Are Christians the ones to be telling others what their significance is in the sight of God? If this is a general problem, in the case of the Jews it becomes acute, for it has been a large part of their problem over the centuries that the church has had at least a negative theology of Israel, namely as the rejected people of God, the Israel which refused its Messiah, killed its Christ and so became deicides. In the light of history, Jews have had to suffer the consequence of being made into figures in the church's theology. Would it not be best, then, to listen with great care and sensitivity to the voices of Jews who ask that we simply leave them out of our theology altogether, that we simply treat them as we claim we ought to treat all human beings: as persons made in the image of God? Why need there be any special Christian theology of the people Israel? Why in this particular case should there be a theology of and about others?

If in spite of these difficulties we were to pursue a positive theology of Israel, we would have to take Israel seriously as it is, and this poses even greater problems. In the first place, the majority of Jews do not take their own election as God's Israel seriously. They do not see themselves as we would have to consider them in a theology of the people Israel. Would not such a theology inevitably wind up in abstractions, speaking of an Israel that does not in fact exist, or exists only quite partially, as the people of God? How can a Christian theology of Israel as the Israel of God not end up as a theology of an Israel that is not identical with the actual Jewish people and so be one further extension of the church's long tradition of talking about Jews on the basis of the Apostolic Writings, ignoring the living Jews of whom it pretended to be speaking?

Serious as is this problem, it is as nothing compared to the other aspect of the difficulty of a theology of Israel that intended by "Israel" to have in focus the present living Jewish people. For if we have real, historical, living Israel, the Jewish people, in view, when we attempt a Christian theology of Israel, then we are confronted by the fact that throughout their long history since the first century, the Jews have insisted that the church is wrong in its most central judgment concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Judaism has not lived from this negation. On the contrary, it has lived from its faithfulness to Torah and Torah's giver. But as a part of that faithfulness, it has felt obliged to give an unambiguously negative judgment on the faith of the Christian church. It has denied that Jesus is or was the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, and it has had, at best, the gravest doubts that with our doctrine of the Trinity we were still speaking of the one God. In a word, they have said a resounding and continuing No to the Christian church and its Jesus Christ.

How then can there possibly be a positive Christian theology of Israel, one that takes them seriously and therefore takes this No seriously? Is it possible, either logically or psychologically, for the Christian church to deal positively with this negation of its own fundamental convictions? The difficulty can be nicely illustrated by a Jewish response to the document "Toward the Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews" which was adopted by the Rheinland Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany on January 11, 1980, perhaps the most positive official church statement on the Jews to appear to date, written in the form of a Confession of Faith, and that by the largest Landeskirche of that church. At the heart of this document it says: "we confess Jesus Christ the Jew, who as the Messiah of Israel is the Savior of the world and binds the peoples of the world to the people of God." To this the Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide has remarked, "There is no example in the history of the world's religions of one faith-community trying to prescribe for another what role a person - even a bringer of salvation - has to play in the sacred history of that other." (Umkehr und Erneuerung, 1980, p. 241) What are we to say,

when, to the Christian assertion that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, Israel replies that we are simply wrong? If our response is that Israel is wrong, then how can there be a positive Christian theology of Israel? If on the other hand we let Israel's witness stand on this point, then how could such a theology of Israel still be Christian?

Before attempting to meet these difficulties in even a preliminary way, something more needs to be said. The problems confronting the development of a Christian theology of the people Israel are such as to require the utmost care and precision in its definition, if it is to be both Christian and also a theology that deals with the real, living Jewish people. It will be useful, as a prior step in this direction, to make clear what such a theology will not be.

First of all, it will not consist of a report on Jewish faith and theology, although the importance of such reports for a Christian theology of Israel cannot be overestimated. I have in mind here such a work as G.F. Moore's ground-breaking Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era (1927, 1930). Along side of this must be placed E.P. Sanders' misleadingly entitled work, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (1977), which fully supports Moore's report and then dots the i's and crosses the t's by criticizing explicitly the Christian scholars whose views of Judaism were not based on Jewish sources, not only before Moore had shown them how to do their neglected homework, but also the mass of so-called scholars since Moore's time who have not yet grasped Moore's simple point that if you want to learn about early Judaism, the material is fully available in the Jewish writings of the time. Moore and Sanders have made accessible, for any who care to know what Judaism in its early development believed about God, man, sin, redemption and the conduct of life, the teachings of the Rabbis who guided Judaism into its great renaissance of the early centuries of the Common Era.

Most recently, one could add to these Clemens Thomas' book, A Christian Theology of Judaism (ET, 1980). Again, the title is misleading, for this is not a theology of Judaism, in the sense of my definition, but another report on the teachings of Judaism

which, along with Moore's and Sanders' works, shows how false it is, for example, to think of Judaism as a religion of works-righteousness, as if the Rabbis, or the Pharisees before them, or the philosophers and theologians who came later, had believed or taught the blasphemous idea that anyone, Jew or Gentile, would or could be justified in the sight of the God of Israel by "works of the Law" or any other works. Thomas' book has the advantage over the others mentioned of surveying also medieval and modern Jewish thinkers and sources, but it does not yet constitute what its title promises.

In effect, the book provides a series of requirements for a Christian theology of Judaism, not the execution of the task. Yet at the one place (p. 28) where the author presents these requirements with any degree of systematic order (and it should be said that Thomas is a biblical and rabbinics scholar, not a systematic theologian), the points made leave much to be desired. His stipulations for a Christian theology of Judaism are that it:

- 1) interpret with radical seriousness Judaism as the origin, contradiction and partner of the Christian church;
- 2) criticize the church for its ignorance of Judaism;
- 3) develop the consequences of the Jewishness of Jesus and his disciples;
- 4) decipher the existence of Judaism in a Christological sense;
- 5) be without antisemitism; and
- 6) test the Christian message in relations to Jewish tradition.

Setting the first point aside for the moment, the second is quite in order and the book contributes material for accomplishing what is asked. The third point is particularly relevant for scholars of the Apostolic Writings, and the fifth applies to all aspects of Christian theology, having no special relevance to a Christian theology of Israel. More interesting are the fourth and sixth points, the one calling for a Christological interpretation of Judaism, and the other presumably asking that Christology, inter alia, be judged in turn by Jewish theology. But can one

have this both ways? Is it important that one comes before the other? Does this order mean that we first run Jewish existence through out theological screen before we let the residue speak to us? The tenor of the book does not suggest this, but one is left wondering what the significance of the order might be.

Finally, we come back to the first point. As it has been formulated, this stipulation would apply as well or better to a history of the rise of Christianity as it might be described in a history of world religions, which is another but different way of considering the relationship between the church and the Jewish people. In a history-of-religions approach, no account need be taken, except descriptively, of the conviction that at issue is the will of the Lord God of heaven and earth, nor of Torah as God's gracious gift to his eternally elect people, nor need the author know him or herself as a Gentile miraculously called by the God of Israel into his service alongside of his people Israel. If "radical seriousness" is to be applied to a theology of Judaism, then the terms should surely be other than those which Thomas has proposed. Would it not be better to start from the beginning by speaking of God, and then deal with Israel and the church with reference to him and his election? Only so, as I see the matter, could we be "radically serious" about Judaism for Christian theology.

Evidence of the limitation of these stipulations appears on the very next page in the way in which the author speaks of the familiar theme of "the profound and essential asymmetry between Judaism and Christianity." This asymmetry he says, "partly stems from the fact that Judaism ('the root') reaches deeply into Christian identity, while Christianity adds little or nothing at all to Jewish self-understanding" (29, ET). On the level of the history of religions, the remark is unexceptionable and has been made by many. If it is the case for Christian theology, however, that the existence of the Gentile church is due to the intention of the God of Israel, then this can hardly be a matter of indifference to Israel. In which case, the much mentioned asymmetry can hardly be so lightly dealt with; it may even

turn out to be a misleading observation. The failure to consider this alternative suggests that the task of developing a Christian theology of Israel or Judaism has not yet been addressed but only prepared for in this book. It is another contribution to a necessary preparation for such a theology.

If a Christian theology of Israel will be more and other than a report on the faith and theology of Israel, of living Judaism, it most certainly will not be and cannot be a Jewish theology. Given the conception of theology with which I am working, it follows that Christian theology can only be the work of Christians on behalf of the Christian church. Jewish theology, mutatis mutandis, could therefore only be carried out by Jewish theologians on behalf of the Jewish people. For Jewish theology to be a self-critical reflection on the life and thought of the Jewish people, testing and proposing Jewish understandings of Jewish life and how Jews ought to understand their present relationship to God, it could only be carried out by Jews. I do not mean to define theology for Jewish theologians, but some of them are in fact engaged in just this work. Not all call themselves theologians, as Franz Rosenzweig did, but Irving Greenberg, Marc Gellman and David Hartman, to give some examples, are clearly engaged in critical analysis of what Jews have thought and done, with the aim of correcting and suggesting better alternatives. Whether this be called the work of Jewish thought or Jewish philosophy, it is functionally Jewish theology in the sense defined, and therefore, being self-critical, is something only Jews can carry out.

I began with a definition of a Christian theology of the people Israel and then considered serious reasons for not engaging in it. Why should it then be done? The task would only make sense if it is the case that Israel is commissioned by God to be his witness, both in what it says and also in what Israel is and does, not in a vacuum, but specifically for the rest of the world and therefore also for the church. A theology of Israel would then not only make sense; it would become a necessity for the church. It would be necessary for the church for the same reason that the

church's hearing the words of and Word which is Jesus is necessary. It would in both cases be a matter of hearing the word of the Lord of Life, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the God of Israel. If this God, the church's God, has set Israel in the world as his witness, and that for the sake of the world, then a Christian theology of Israel is a necessity for the church's faithfulness to God. It would be not more optional for the church than its loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Israel's election to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, to be as Abraham's seed a blessing for all the nations, however, is central to the Scriptures of Israel which the church from the beginning acknowledged as its Canon or norm. Israel's election is debatable only if the church is willing to place its Canon in debate. This the church has not on the whole wanted to do. What it has felt debatable is its interpretation of the Canon. It has in fact read the story of Israel's election as a story come to an end, in flat contradiction to another piece of its Canon, the assertion of the Apostle Paul that the gifts and call of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29) and that "you do not support the root; the root supports you" (11:18). It has read its "Old testament" as a story that is passing away, having been taken up, renewed and ultimately superceded by its "New Testament", so that the election of Israel was no longer seen to have a continuing reality. Whatever it was that was Israel's by the grace of its election was now applicable to the church. The church had become Israel.

This reading of the Scriptures and the Apostolic Writings, however, has itself become a matter of debate in recent decades. Paul's words are being heard for the first time in the church's history. Reversing eighteen centuries of Christian teaching, it is now being asserted officially that if Israel was once elected, its election is eternal. God's covenant with Israel is eternal, it is being argued, for this is surely the message of Israel's Scriptures. It is certainly what Israel has heard from its Scriptures throughout its history. Now the church is beginning to hear this same word. If the church is hearing this word, then it has no choice but to acknowledge Israel's election. Then a Christian theology of Israel becomes a necessary part of the church's theological task.

If Israel's election is unquestionable from God's side, it is equally unassailable from Israel's side. Unfaithful Israel is still God's elect people. Whether Israel accepts its election and is obedient to the covenant or not, it remains Israel. In a Christian theology of Israel, care would have to be taken not to idealize the Jewish people. As any Christian (theologian) knows who is at all knowledgeable about the Jewish people, just as all is not well with the household of Jesus Christ, so all is not well with the household of Israel. Perhaps the great majority of Jews today do not accept their divine election. They may have only a sense that Jews are Jews - i.e. different - but they do not think of themselves as a people elect by God. At the most, they may think of themselves as the descendents of those who once thought they were God's chosen people. Perhaps the majority of Jews in the world today do not accept the obligation to live according to Torah. At most they may acknowledge a Jewish ethical tradition, more or less definite in content, to which they give at least some allegiance. But trust in God^{and} his covenant and faithfulness to Torah have always been problematical in Israel. There is no charge of this sort that cannot be found in Israel's prophets and reiterated in the writings of its Rabbis.

Indeed, according to the way Israel preserved and retells its own story (in Exod. 32), the people set up and worshipped the Golden Calf even as the covenant was being sealed by the gift of Torah. Israel is just this problematic people, only sometimes and in part faithful to its covenant, but nevertheless the people whose life and history is marked forever by its election and by God's covenant with it. This is the human, the all-too-human face of revelation, apart from which human beings will never have any access to the God of Israel. Israel, faithful but also unfaithful, is where they have to look if they are to see God's participation in his creation and learn who this God is and what he wills to happen in and to his creation.

Israel's election, which became flesh in the establishment of the covenant of Sinai, is the presupposition of the history and mission of Jesus of Nazareth and of Paul, the apostles, and all the authors of the Apostolic Writings. They saw them-

selves in that context and in its light. The story which they had to tell was, so they believed, more of that same story that was Israel's, or it was Israel's story now brought to a decisive focus:

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom he created the world" (Hebr. 1:1-2).

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scripture, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ..." (Rom. 1:1-3).

"My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior, ... He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, Abraham and his posterity for ever" (Lk. 1:46-55).

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of the holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham" (Lk. 1:68-73).

This brief selection of texts confirms Karl Barth's point that Marcion's proposal to dispense with the "Old Testament" could not have worked, for if the "Old Testament" goes, then the "New Testament" must go with it. Especially the passages from Marcion's favorite Gospel, Luke, show that Luke's book would itself have to be rejected if the church were to reject Israel, Israel's prophets, Israel's King David, Israel's covenant and Israel's father Abraham. Everything that matters to the Christian church stands or falls with the election of Israel. This dependence is the first reason for the necessity of a Christian theology of Israel.

A Christian theology of Israel is also necessary because the Christian church claims that in its own witness the Scriptures of Israel are confirmed. The church does not intend to witness to any other God than that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It does not bear witness to the God of the philosophers, in Pascal's phrase, not because it has anything against philosophy, but only in order to focus clearly and exclusively on the God of Israel. The church has meant to point to the One to whom Moses and the prophets pointed. Its witness is meant to be a confirmation of the witness of the Scriptures.

To confirm is to make firm, to corroborate, to ratify. It means to say Yes. When the church, in its Apostolic Writings and in its witness through the centuries, confirmed and confirms Israel's Scriptures, it says Yes to the witness of those Scriptures. It says Amen, So be it. It cannot then intend to displace or replace that witness with its own. Rather, it adds its witness to that of Israel with the intent of confirming Israel's witness. It does so because it believes, with the apostle Paul, that "all of the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus Christ]." (2 Cor. 1:20). That is why, Paul continued, we "utter the Amen through [Jesus Christ] to the glory of God." Because Jesus called none other Father than the one God of Israel, attested to in the Scriptures of his people, so the church's witness can only confirm the witness of those Scriptures.

From the earliest days of the church, it has been said that Christ stands to the Scriptures of Israel as fulfillment stands to prophecy. From this has developed the model of promise and fulfillment for understanding the relationship between the Scriptures and the Apostolic Writings, or here we may say bluntly, the Old and the New Testaments. The point of departure for this development was the Lukan story of Jesus reading the messianic passage from the scroll of Isaiah and concluding, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:16-21). Its classic expression is the comment of the author of Hebrews on the promise of a new or renewed covenant, written on the heart, from Jeremiah 31:31-34: "In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Hebr. 8:10-13). The Old Covenant or Testament

contains the promises; the New Covenant or Testament witnesses to their fulfillment. The emphasis in 'fulfillment' is on the 'full.' All the promises of God to Israel are now fulfilled in Christ.

A subtler and interesting variation on this model was developed by Karl Barth in his Church Dogmatics I/2, Section 14, within the framework of his central contention that both the Scriptures and the Apostolic Writings witness to the one revelation of God which is identical with Jesus Christ. The Scriptures witness in the form of expectation, the Apostolic Writings in the form of recollection of the one revelation. Within this difference, however, a dialectic is at work in both Testaments (pp 80ff, 103ff). The object of Scripture's witness is not only coming, not simply expected, but also present (94ff). A gift of presence is there, even as it points ahead to what is coming. The object of the Apostolic Writings' witness has come and is present as a gift given, and yet that presence also points ahead to a coming (113ff). Both have as their object the One mysterious hidden God of Israel as he unveils his hiddenness in self-revelation.

In spite of this dialectic, it is clear, according to Barth, that that which the Scriptures expect is identical with that which the Apostolic Writings recollect, that the New Testament remembers what the Old Testament expects. Barth failed to take into account, however, the extent to which the Apostolic Writings recollect what was not expected by the authors of the Scriptures - e.g. a Messiah without a messianic age or the restoration of Israel. And he ignored the extent to which the Apostolic Writings do not recollect what the Scriptures surely expect - e.g. nations beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Barth's modification of the traditional model of promise and fulfillment is itself in need of modification. Expectation modified by presence, and recollection of presence modified by further expectation, miss the point that the mode of presence is not the same in the two Testaments. Both speak of the presence of the One God of Israel, but he is present to his people in one way (in Torah, Temple, Land, the people themselves), and present to his church in another (Jesus Christ, the Spirit, the

Eucharist, the community of believers). Likewise the expectations of the coming of God are also shaped to the lives and forms of the two different communities. There is certainly a common focus, since it is never any other than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who is recollected, sensed and expected, yet this same hidden one unveils himself in two different ways in the two collections of testimony. In a word, the One God unveils his love for Israel in Torah and his love for his church in Jesus Christ. The strength of the model of promise and fulfillment lies in underscoring this common object of witness. Its weakness, in however modified a form, is to ignore the different ways in which this object is remembered by, present to and future for the two communities. We therefore judge it an inadequate model for expressing the genuine novelty-within-continuity to which the Apostolic Writings bear witness.

As a confirmation of the Scriptures, the Apostolic Writings testify to Jesus Christ as God's Yes to all his promises. To confirm a promise, however, is not the same as to fulfill it. God's promise to Israel, for example, includes among other things the land. In Jesus Christ, if we are to believe the apostle Paul, God said Yes also to that promise to Israel. The church of Jesus Christ, therefore, cannot coherently do other than confirm and support the promise of the Land to the Jewish people. It cannot distort this promise to the people Israel into a spiritualized promise to the church. In doing that it would be testifying to Jesus Christ as a No to this particular and by no means peripheral promise. In order to remain coherent with its Apostolic Writings, therefore, the church must be more cautious with its use of the word 'fulfillment' than it has been in its past. Perhaps instead of turning to a weaker expression, such as "partial fulfillment", it would do better to try some other model than that of promise and fulfillment. Promise and confirmation suggests itself. What seems to be fundamental and incontestable is that the church of Jesus Christ, the church of the God of Israel, cannot be itself without confirming God's choice of, covenant with and promises to Israel. If God in Christ has said Yes to that, then the church can only take up and repeat that Yes to Israel.

As a necessary aid to this affirmation, it will have to develop a theology of the people Israel.

I have argued the necessity for a Christian theology of the people Israel on the grounds of Israel's election and the fact of Israel's Scriptures being canonical for the church. These grounds are of sufficient weight to meet the first difficulty of such an undertaking. The fact that the church has never had such a theology is no reason for not beginning now what should have been done all along. Note that I am not arguing the necessity on the grounds of recent events in Jewish history. The recent events of the Holocaust and the existence of the State of Israel have certainly contributed to Christian awareness of Judaism, but they do not of themselves constitute reasons for a Christian theology of the Jewish people. Rather, they have helped make the church aware of a need that has been there all along. What is needed, therefore, is not a theology of the Holocaust, whatever that may be supposed to be, but a Christian theology of the people Israel, the people of God's election as his witnesses to the world and a light to the Gentiles.

In response to the second difficulty, concerning a theology of the other, there is this to be said. There is no way that the church can avoid speaking of the people who wrote, preserved and are themselves the protagonist of the largest part of the church's Canon. The only question will be how that speaking is to be done. The recently published Guidelines for Jewish-Christian Dialogue of the World Council of Church's Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People reflects a growing consensus that Christian talk about the Jews must be based on Christian listening to the Jews, that talk about them depends upon talk with them, that our understanding of them requires that we first learn from them how they understand themselves. It may be hoped that this dialogical experience will bear fruit not only in a Christian theology of the people Israel, but also in Christian reflection on God's ways with many other peoples of the world from whom we may have something to learn. A better theology of the Jewish people may thus help Christians to do better theology concerning quite other peoples.

Finally, I should like to sketch the outlines of a response to the last difficulty, concerning the Jewish denial of Christian claims concerning Jesus Christ.

There are four points to be made about the No:

1. The first thing to be clear about is that it does not refer to a supposed No of the Jewish people, in or about the year 30 C.E., to the so-called historical Jesus of Nazareth. Our evidence on that is far too limited and of such a nature as to make it a matter of uncertain speculation. The evidence suggests that of the tiny fraction of all the Jews in the Roman Empire at that time who may ever have heard of Jesus, much less heard him, a large number responded positively. Indeed it would appear that for some fifty years after Easter, the Synagogue tolerated Jews in its membership who, ever faithful to Torah, believed that Jesus was Israel's Messiah whom God had exalted. The split would appear to have developed not because of Jesus nor even because of Easter. The issue turned on Jewish fidelity to Torah. When Gentile Christians began telling Jews who believed in Jesus that Torah was no more to be followed by them, then all faithful Jews had to say No.

2. The second and far more basic point to understand about the Jewish No, therefore, is that it was from the beginning and has continued to be an act of fidelity to Torah and Torah's God. The Gospel met Gentiles as a demand to abandon their pagan ways and the service of gods that are not God. The Gospel met the Jew, as the church preached it, as the demand to abandon the express commands and covenant of the very God whom the church proclaimed! Here is a profound incoherence that is the business of systematic theology to unravel. The theological reality to which a Christian theology of Israel must address itself, then, is that Israel has said No to Jesus Christ out of faithfulness to the Father of Jesus Christ, the God of Israel.

3. This No was for the sake of the church. The one positive view of this to be found in the Apostolic Writings is that of Paul: "through their 'trespass' (their No) salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11); "their 'trespass'

(their No) means riches for the world," "for the Gentiles" (11:12); "their rejection (it is God who has "hardened" them (11:7), given them "eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear") (11:8) means the reconciliation of the world" (11:15). In sum, "with respect of the Gospel (that is, Paul's Gospel, which always included the opening to the Gentiles) they [the Jewish people] are enemies of God for your sake, but with respect of election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers" (11:28). Why? "Because the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (11:29).

What shall we say to that? The Jewish No to Jesus Christ, Paul was saying, was according to the will of God and was for our sake, and therefore it was made in faithfulness to the Father of Jesus Christ. Surely we owe thanks to God through Jesus Christ that they so responded. More must be said, however. Within a Christian theology of Israel, it must be said that Israel's God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. What, however, does it mean for Israel that its God was doing this in Christ? Surely it cannot mean that Israel is thereupon lumped together with "the world." If today we have learned, then surely Paul knew, that the most zealous of the Pharisees (and Paul numbered himself among these) understood "the curse of the Law" to fall upon the Gentiles (for having rejected Torah at Sinai, according to Pharisaic tradition), not upon Israel. This curse has now been removed, Paul said. The Rabbis were to make repentance, hardly mentioned by Paul, into the cornerstone of the solution to Israel's failures in living by Torah. What then has God done for Israel in Christ?

The primary significance of Christ for the Jewish people is that their God was in him opening their light to the nations, the Gentiles. Had that light not been used by the church to scorch Jews with every opportunity, Israel might well have come to thank God for this that he had done. But surely that is but the beginning of an adequate response to Paul. The Jews as Jews, that is, in all their faithfulness to Torah and Torah's Giver, remain determined by the irrevocable gifts and call of God, Paul had said. They therefore remain God's elect people, chosen to be witnesses and

light to the nations. Their No has therefore to be seen as an integral part of God's witness to Gentiles who have become Christians. If Christians take it positively, indeed explicitly, as God's word to them, even a word concerning Jesus Christ, then they may hear it as Christ's word to his Church as delivered through his brothers and sisters, the Jewish people. Its content is:

- a. No to Christian schizophrenia which invented "redemption in principle" to displace God's redemption of his creation for which it still waits.
- b. No to the dichotomies of Law and Gospel, faith and works, theology and ethics. God wills genuine sanctified living, acting and thinking.
- c. No to turning their backs on creation, breaking up God's reality into sacred and secular spheres, focusing their prayers and hopes on another "world", rather than on the renewal and completion of God's beloved creation.

In sum, the church may hear "the Jewish No" as a repudiation of every flight from the Incarnation, from that unity of the Creator and the creaturely sealed for Israel at Sinai and for us in Jesus Christ. This message of the Incarnation is Israel's witness to us, part and parcel of its witness to the God and Father of Jesus Christ which a Christian theology of Israel needs to develop and for which we should make Eucharist every Lord's Day.

4. Finally, the Jewish No is to be heard as an invitation to and a challenge for the church to find a Gentile - i.e. non-Jewish - way in which to serve the One God of Israel and therefore a Gentile - i.e. non-Jewish - way in which to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. That means explicitly that it find some more adequate concept than mashiah with which to define the relationship between Jesus and the Israel of God. Whatever 'messiah' may have meant in the first century, its meaning in the history of the Jewish tradition falls far short of the indeluble connection between Jesus and Israel that is essential to the faith and existence of the Christian church to this day. It would be an important part of a Christian theology of the people Israel to point out that, in fact, this term has never been central to the

church's confession of Jesus Christ, and that in the terms 'Son', 'Word' and 'Lord', it has long since developed concepts that do the job far more adequately than the Jewish concept of 'messiah'. These terms too have their roots in Israel's Scriptures, but as the church has developed them, they serve more adequately to show the inseparable connection between the election of Israel and the election of the church in Jesus Christ, and this the concept of messiah was never intended to do. A Christian theology of Israel would therefore serve the rest of the church's theology by listening to and learning from even the Jewish rejection of the church's Jesus Christ. Although beset with difficulties, it merits a place of high priority on the agenda of systematic Christian theology.