

Toward A Christian Doctrine of Israel

How should Christian theology, for the sake of its own truth and mission, think about Israel, and about continuing Jewish identity?

IT IS ARGUABLE that Christian theology throughout its history has had one chief subterranean agitator: unresolved understanding of Israel's place in that will of God on which the church relies for her own meaning. Within the context of this Christian problem, "Israel" denotes two communal realities, whose relation to each other is itself part of what confuses us. One is the national political and cultic structure that was still—if perilously—intact at the time of the church's birth; the other is a particular continuation of Israel consequent on the destruction of that structure, the people and practices we now know as the Jews and Judaism.

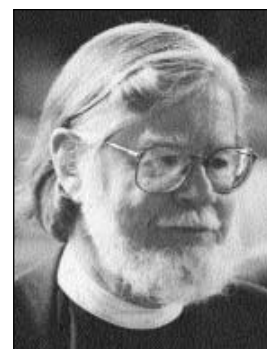
The thoughts I want to lay before you this evening are an attempted direct assault on the problem. Thus they do not fall under the rubric of comparative religion. Nor are they located within the currently agitated discussion of Christianity's relation to "other religions." The church can regard neither the religion of old Israel nor Judaism as an "other religion;" and that holds even if Judaism cannot return the recognition. Moreover, my almost entirely second-hand acquaintance with Talmud and the classic later texts would in any case disqualify me from either of those other tasks.

The problem for this evening is strictly a problem within Christian systematic theology. Only that circumstance gives me the right or courage to address you. My in itself modest, if ferociously difficult question is: How should Christian theology, for the sake of its own truth and mission, think about Israel? And most poignantly, about continuing Jewish identity?

I will in various connections argue that Israel *must* continue separately from the church, precisely from the church's point of view. Let it be said once and for all: by that I will not mean that the church needs Jews and Judaism, and that therefore God continues them; I mean that, supposing that God wills the church—which Christian theology must after all suppose—the continuance of Israel, as an other community than the church, is a necessary part of God's final intention.

I should perhaps tell you something also of how I come to speak on this topic at this time. When the first volume of my systematic theology appeared, a friend said he thought he detected the nucleus

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of a theology of Israel. I, knowing what was in the second volume, realized that there was slightly more than a nucleus, and that perhaps I could make some contribution by pulling scattered paragraphs and sentences together and then thinking some more. When I had to produce a topic for the public lecture I had promised to give, I thought, Why not? I have since had occasion to wonder at my rashness.

II

When Marcion explicitly claimed that the church had no permanent relation to Israel, other than jubilant independence, his proposition was pretty quickly rejected. The church, Jewish and gentile, knew that salvation was of the Jews, worked in the history between the Lord and his chosen people.

But what then was the church's relation to Israel? And particularly how was the church to deal with the fact that the vast majority of the people had not accepted the gospel? The church after all proclaimed a wholly Jewish message: that God had raised one of his servants from the dead, so that he was installed as Messiah, in heaven if not yet on earth; that the removal of the death-shroud from the nations, and just so the vindication of Israel, had begun; that in Jesus' Resurrection the Lord had at last begun to fulfill his final, eschatological promises. But most of Israel simply did not credit it. How was the church to deal with the continued existence of Jewish identity *outside* the church? Notoriously, already Paul was stricken by the question. The church had to claim in some sense to continue Israel; what then was she to make of this other claimant?

Just so, moreover, the actual church quickly became overwhelmingly gentile. How now was she to read the history, law, wisdom and prophecy of Israel as the past of her own present and future, and as law and promise for her own life? How were Greeks and Syrians and Latins to read Israel's Scripture as their Scripture, with few or no Jews

in their midst to instantiate its referent and its original community of interpretation?

The catastrophe of the final Jewish wars seemed to remove some of the difficulty. As Robert Wilken has pointed out, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the termination of sacrifice and priesthood, and the completed subjugation of the land to Rome, an empire remarkable for perseverance in its conquests, all seemed permanent at the time, whether one lamented or rejoiced in the event. It was not unreasonable for gentile Christians, who indeed believed that the true God had identified himself by and with Israel's history and mission, but had themselves no native stake in the nation as such, to conclude from the catastrophes of the 70s that the nation must have completed its role in God's history. Thereby Jewish unbelief was assimilated to unbelief in general, a much less threatening phenomenon.

Moreover, gentile culture provided hermeneutic resources for reading the Old Testament as *background* for the gospel, as texts that indeed are needed to understand the gospel, but are not themselves part of the gospel. And of course anybody—Greek, Norwegian, whatever—can with sufficient study learn to read strange texts as background for things more familiar.

Except that there were those folk still there, all those unconvinced Jews, even deprived of land and temple. That is, there was still a people self-identified by descent from Abraham and Sarah, and by certain salvageable features of old Israel's life; and nearly all these folk continued to refuse either to recognize Jesus as Messiah or to renounce the theological importance of their identity as Jews.

It was all very well to relativize this phenomenon as "Israel according to the flesh" and describe the church as Israel according to some other principle. The trouble is, being *Israel* has always been a matter very much of the flesh, and Christian theology could never quite deny that. The reason it could not, as Michael Wyschograd has indefatigably insisted, is that it is exactly the fleshly, incarnational

character of God's relation to Israel which makes the Christian claims about Jesus intelligible in the first place. Jesus' bodily Resurrection made no sense to Luke's stereotypical Athenians, devotees of pure spirituality as they were; Jews understood the claim well enough, even though most thought it in fact false. And while most of Israel has not credited the particular incarnational claim about Jesus, the God of Israel's Scripture is a God to whom Incarnation cannot as such be alien—not if he can indulge in a little wrestling match with Jacob, or sit down to Abraham and Sarah's cooking, or converse with humans as his own "angel;" not if all the phenomena the rabbis put together as the Shekinah are appropriate to him; or if he can, again citing Wyschograd, establish an earthly address at Number One Temple Avenue. Gentile Christians could not completely suppress the fact of their faith's dependence on Israel's claims for the Lord's fleshly involvement with Israel.

Moreover, to whatever extent the church succeeded in suppressing the claims of Israel according to the flesh, she did so only at her great theological peril. For if connections established in the flesh are to be relativized, what of the Son's birth from Mary according to the flesh, or his death on the Cross according to the flesh? Or for that matter, the resurrection itself, "of the flesh"? Allow me a brief excursus here.

The Lord was born of Mary "according to the flesh." Then just whom and what did Mary bear? God the Son in person? Not if the flesh is unessential in God's active relation to us. Perhaps then a fleshly someone or something somehow related to God the Son? Maybe extremely closely related? You will recognize a fast caricature of the christological controversies that tore the ancient church. It is at least possible that the need to rationalize Israel's refusal, and so to relativize the importance of the flesh, provided one hidden energy of the successive christological evasions with which the church struggled though 400 years of controversy.

The Lord was crucified according to the flesh. Believers for whom

the flesh was problematic first thought that just for this reason God the Son could not be quite 100% God the Son; and when that eventually did not fly, that Jesus, so indisputably crucified, could not exactly be the very person *God* the Son, though very closely joined and approximated to him. As for the resurrected Lord himself, it is safe to say that nearly all gentile Christians thought from the beginning and still think of him on dubiously fleshly lines—not to put too fine a point on it, as a spook of some sort, in the modern version of spookiness, a meaning or a symbol or an image or whatever.

The ancient church spent much of her intellectual and spiritual energies overcoming the trinitarian and christological and eschatological heresies that constantly emerged within her. That is, she spent her energies overcoming irresolution about the flesh. It is hard to think there is no connection between this history and her antecedent tendency to relativize Israel according to the flesh.

III

In any case of such historicist speculations, there, despite Titus and his aftermath, were folk then and thereafter called the Jews. The successors of the Pharisees had done heroic work, to create a Judaism adapted specifically for the absence of Temple, land and sacrifice, that was yet in recognizable continuity with the life of old Israel. And most of these folk maintained their own communal identity outside and indeed in opposition to the church. Did they and their religious practice have some role in that history of Israel to which the church looks for salvation? Which is to say, was the church somehow still bound to them? If so, for what? They had their own way of reading the Scriptures, and disputed the legitimacy of the church's way. How could one meet their claim?

I will not take you through the history of the church's attempt to understand the phenomenon of a continuing Judaism. It is another thing I do not know enough about, and most of the old

discussion is anyway now moot. Contemporary worry is focussed on one theologoumenon which emerged in that history—anything so august as a doctrine it never was—the proposition that the church has “superseded” Israel, and that will be the thread of my lecture. All hands are now agreed: supersessionism is a bad thing, and the right doctrine will be one that avoids it. Denominations have renounced it, including some that never taught it in the first place. One very fine younger theologian has devoted a good bit of his career so far to diagnosing supersessionism in theologians who never dreamed they had the disease, including, I regret to say, myself.

Supersessionism is the teaching, explicit or implicit, that with Christ’s coming and the birth of the church, the salvific role of Israel as a separately identifiable people is simply over. If that is the case, Jews who now wish to be faithful to Israel’s God have only one possibility: they must be baptized into the church. And the continuing synogogue can only be an institutionalization of unfaithfulness. Christians willing to make such assertions, willing to be supersessionists, are now quite thin on the ground.

But here is the rub to initiate our reflections: many attempts to supersede supersessionism presume that this cannot be done without retreating from the church’s classic christological teaching. My first task is to rebut this assumption.

At bottom, the claims Christians make about Christ all merely unpack the one claim of his Resurrection, within a discourse in continuity with that of the Old Testament. They unpack the claim that prior to the general resurrection and vindication of Israel, one servant of Israel and her God has already been raised and vindicated.

Now—on the one hand, this confession concentrates the mission and privileges of Israel in this one Israelite. The various figures as which the God of Israel had appeared as an agent *within* Israel and so as both himself and someone over against

himself—“the angel of the Lord,” “the glory of the Lord”, the “Word of the Lord,” the “name of the Lord”—step forward as an actual individual historical agent. The Shekinah becomes personal. The Suffering Servant of the prophet of Exile, in the texts at once identical with Israel as servant to the nations and an individual servant within and to Israel, appears as a personal historical Jew. Israel’s sonship has prepared a Son. The House of David is identical with this one descendent.

And then on the other hand, those in the primal church won the argument who maintained that the appearance of the Messiah, however proleptic, meant that the time had come for the nations to gather at Zion—and indeed had they not, the church would of course not exist. With the consequent appearance of the church of Jews and gentiles, the mission and privileges of Israel expanded to embrace a community that was itself no longer uniquely determined by descent from Abraham.

Thus if the full range and force of New Testament claims for the risen Jesus are maintained, it may indeed seem that we merely thereby claim that with his resurrection to be Lord and Christ the nation of Israel has simply achieved God’s purpose for it, and is no longer needed. Except that this last step presupposes something: that Christ’s advent as the rabbi and prophet of Nazareth, the Crucified, and the resurrected and ascended Lord, is such a coming of Messiah as can conclude Israel’s history. But plainly it cannot be that; as the rabbis have always insisted, had the Messiah simply arrived, were Jesus’ Resurrection and Ascension his advent as such, things would have to look rather different than they do. And the church has always rejected the “enthusiasm” which acts as if the Last Day has already passed. Until the Lord comes, as we say, “in glory,” the Messiah is not so come as to complete Israel’s story. And that proposition can stand however we conceptualize the End itself.

Going over it again, it has commonly been supposed that a

non-supersessionist theology must be incompatible with belief that the advent of Jesus as the Christ fulfills the promises to Israel. Since the identity of Christ as the Son is the same fact as his finality in God's history with his people, supersessionism could then only be avoided by repristinating a Christology in which Jesus is not quite identical with the Son, that is, by repristinating Arianism or so called Nestorianism.

But by the insight won in the ancient broils, such a withdrawal amounts to retreat from the faith. If the common supposition were correct, then the church to be faithful to her gospel would in fact have to say that after Christ's resurrection no Judaism could have a further role in God's history with his people. The common supposition, however, is wrong.

The time of the church is after all not a piece of the Kingdom, we do not now enjoy the final vision of God. Yet neither is the time of the church simply a continuation of this world's history. The time of the church is a time within the advent of the Christ to fulfill Israel's history. The Day of the Lord turns out, in the New Testament, to be commodious, and the church's time is what is thus accommodated. Until the last judgment and our own resurrection, the Christ has not yet come in the way that consummates Israel's mission. It is a rather obvious point, yet much can be gained by contemplating it.

Alfred Loisy's notorious *mot* states the exact truth: "Jesus announced the Kingdom, but it was the church which came." Loisy's dictum carried a considerable burden of irony in its own context; we can appropriate it more straightforwardly. Much attention has been given to the question of the church's institution. The right answer, I think, is simple if at first perhaps surprising: God institutes the church by *not* doing something, by not doing what linear-thinking readers of the prophets would have predicted: God institutes the church by not letting Jesus' Resurrection be itself the End, by appointing the famous "delay of

the Parousia." St. Luke is in remarkable agreement with Loisy: at the resurrection-appearance which he sets up to be the last, "the Ascension," Luke has the disciples ask, "Lord, is this the time when you restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Jesus avoids the question, and we should note that this is *all* he does, he does not say, "Well, it really isn't that kind of kingdom, it's more spiritual," or any of the other things various pietisms have put in his mouth here. In place of any answer at all, he promises the gift of the Spirit as the power to conduct a mission to Jews and gentiles. And then a beginning and an end are set for this mission, by Jesus' departure and by the angelic promise of his return. The straight line route to the Kingdom is broken, and a side trip through the church with its mission is ordained.

I have been talking of a "space within" Messiah's Advent to fulfill Israel. Let me vary the language and introduce a notion I will use through the following, again suggested by Loisy's cynicism: the notion of *detour*. The church, which came when the Kingdom should have come, and leads to the Kingdom by way of the mission to the gentiles, is precisely a detour from what before the fact had to be seen as the straight line of God's purpose.

Detours, indeed, are not uncommon in the Lord's history with us, as Scripture tells it. We may think of the patriarchs' journeyings and hoverings around the edges of the land, the time of slavery in Egypt, the establishment of a human monarchy, and above all the Exile.

And we can perhaps discern some of the reason of this new detour. Through most of Israel's history, the Lord's promises seemed practical within the history of this world, including the promise that Israel would be a blessing to all nations. But the prophets of the Exile proclaimed a victory of the Lord and a vindication of Israel not to be accommodated by the parameters of this age, a transformation of all things to accommodate absolute righteousness and peace. In the message of these prophets the ful-

fillment of the promise for the nations accordingly becomes the nations' universal pacification and rectification by common gathering to Zion, an event again not conceivable within the regularities which now determine history. So: Is *this* gathering of the gentiles the conclusion of Israel's mission in history or itself a feature of the great Transformation?

After the fact we can discern the appropriate step in the story: what had to happen is a gathering of the gentiles that is *at once* a mission conducted this side the End and an event of the End itself. The needed step in the story is a church of Jews and gentiles *within* the last great Day of the Lord, within the space opened by the delay of the Lord's final advent, a detour from the straight path to the Kingdom.

IV

So much for the church as detour. My proposal is: Christian theology should interpret continuing Judaism as another such detour occupying the same time as the church, paired with the one that is the church for reasons which may even be in some part knowable. Again I have to emphasize that this is strictly a proposal to Christian theology, not to Jewish self-understanding, and can only be cast from the church's viewpoint.

The church and what we now know as Judaism are, after all, remarkably twinned historical entities. The religion of Israel around the turn of the millennia was a fairly loose denominational system, unified neither by any very extensive body of shared doctrine or even by any very extensive common reading of Torah. The various Judaisms—in the plural, as Jacob Neusner refers to them—were united rather by land and temple. When these were undone, those Judaisms survived that could in a pinch do without them: these were the disciples of the Lord Jesus, who could regroup around his person; and the Judaism created by the rabbis

precisely to deal with such catastrophe, a Judaism centered around the study of Torah, possible under all circumstances.

In general, the two, the one the Judaism of the rabbis, and the other the church, were born and made their way through history in a kind of lock step and in theological and structural mutual mirroring. Strictly historically, each is an equally plausible continuation of canonical Israel, emerging from the same period of crisis; neither, I think, has any historically tenable argument to raise against the other's claim to continue God's history with Israel. As to the Scripture, the synagogue reads it as Torah, guaranteed and interpreted by the narrative; the church reads Scripture for its narrative, with a plot given meaning by Torah and appropriate to be continued by the mission, death and Resurrection of Jesus. Neither, I think, has any historically plausible argument to make against the other's reading.

Can Christian theology discern her own reason of that other detour on the way to the one End? Had Israel believed, something like what we now know as Judaism would have been the matrix of the ecclesia's life, the community into which baptism brought gentiles; and this is what Paul had to think was in *some* sense how it should have been—which was his torment. Only that is *not* what happened, and if we believe God's promises cannot fail, we have to think that what in fact has happened is also somehow within the will of God. And that, for the church, is the mystery.

The great precedent in thinking that mystery is of course those chapters of Paul to the Romans. I will not adopt Paul's particular apocalyptic construction—if indeed there was one—but I will obey what I take to be his conviction and mandate. With Paul I will insist that there is somehow God's reason, also from the church's point of view, for Israel's separate existence, in the time between the times. And I will with Paul insist that any attempt to discover that reason must above all obey the rule that the promises of God cannot fail.

I will shape my proposals around ecumenical ecclesiology's three favorite rubrics for the church: the church is the people of God, the temple of the Spirit, and the body of Christ.

V

The church, according to current ecumenical theology, is to be essentially a *people*. Now a people is a very particular sort of community. A people is an irreducible given for its members; one did not create one's people, by contract or otherwise, one does not choose it, and once born into it one cannot escape it. When the church is right, she has this character of givenness: once you are in the church, you know it was not finally your choice which brought you there, and once you are baptized the church will never let go her claim on you. The church is not to be a voluntary association, however religious.

And yet there is of course something *willed* about the church. One is not exactly born into it, but reborn; and so there is that interval for choice, your own or your parents'. And however we may acknowledge the mystery of predestination, undeniably there is an element of decision about joining or remaining in the church. The church is therefore tempted to establish its felt necessary character as a given fact for the persons who belong to her by the *impersonality* of her institutions, which are there whether or not they are willed by any individual or generation. Yet of course nor is the church to have the givenness of an institutionalization of benefits, even if these be called grace. A people may indeed have very heavy-duty institutions of continuity, but the persons who are the people do not approach these institutions as something other than themselves, and indeed can sometimes rebel against them without ceasing to be the very same people they were. When the church is right she has this character of inner mutuality and freedom.

Despite all her minutely self-documented shortcomings, canonical Israel was genuinely a people. And so now are the Jews a people, with Rabbinic Judaism somehow at their center, and despite all assimilation and secularism. Had Israel followed the gospel, and had the history of God's people thus made only the one detour, it would have been this Israel who accommodated the gentiles gathered in by baptism, who baptized her own only as John baptized the people of Jerusalem, not to initiate them into a new religion but to renew faithfulness to the religion they were born into, and who on the detour's journey sustained herself and her gentile incorporates by the very Jewish Supper of the Lord.

Indeed, a search of the New Testament references to "the people of God" quickly discovers something rather surprising, considering the freedom with which Christian theology now uses this language: when the New Testament refers to the people of God it rarely has the church in mind. It is the nation of Israel which also in the New Testament continues to appear as "the people" of God, and when the New Testament does refer to the church as God's people, this is in every case but one done at least in part to relate her to Israel.

It seems to be a deep habit of language: the New Testament witnesses, and notably the very apostle to the gentiles, cannot quite call the church the people of God without simultaneous reference to the Jews. Perhaps we may say: what primal Christians *meant* by being God's people was instantiated around them by the people to which they themselves mostly belonged.

As a missionary community, the church indeed appeals to choice in a way peoples strictly according to the flesh do not. However we may, once in the church, acknowledge God's call as the agent of our incorporation, a call is something other than a pregnancy, and at least adult converts do in a very straightforward sense voluntarily apply for baptism. And Paul was surely right in holding that the gentiles among those converts must come in *as*

gentiles, and so as those free in principle from much of Torah, which is again a kind of freedom untypical of any people. Had Israel followed the gospel, the one continuation of Israel would have accommodated just such a subcommunity of gentile volunteers.

It did not go that way. Probably it could not have in any long term. The confrontation at Antioch between Peter and Paul could perhaps have been only so many times repeated before things tipped one way or the other.

It did not go as it “should” have, and perhaps indeed because it could not. Whatever might have been, the way it is, is that some Jews continue to be called to the church of Jews and gentiles and that most Jews are not so called. The Eucharist depicted in the book of Revelation, in which the tribes of Israel lead the gentiles in praise of the Lord will be celebrated only in the *New Jerusalem*; the people of God to which the gentiles are gathered must wait for that city.

And here the step: it *must* be so. Lest in this time of the church-detour the promises of God be vain and he have no proper people, Jews and Judaism continue. For the church as she is, without the enveloping Jewish matrix, cannot by herself provide God with a *people*. The church in the meantime as she is can only *hope* to be a people, not having in herself the connections of the flesh and the givenness they create. Israel continues as the integral people of God, in a form precisely designed for *waiting*, waiting, as the church must understand it, for the two detours to be accomplished.

On the church’s separated path, she constantly veers to being what she must not be, a voluntary religious association or an institution to provide benefits, or worst of all both at once, like the American mainline denominations. If she is now the people of God, she is it in heaven, that is, in God’s anticipation of the day when Israel and the church will be one. The church can now truly

claim to be the people of God only as she claims to be in God’s intention one people with the continuing nation of the Jews, and she must make this claim whether the recognition is reciprocated or not.

VI

The church is to be a temple of the Spirit. The question is chronic and currently more than usually acute: Which Spirit? The world is full of, as we now say, “spiritualities,” each luxuriating in some spirit or other. And throughout her history, the church has again and again misidentified the spirit, offering at least a side-chapel or two for accommodation of some spirit of the age or of a nation or of a gender or of whatever.

The one-word epithets in the creeds—in the Nicene creed, holy, lordly and life-giving—are little help in identifying the Spirit among the spirits, since while most of the world’s spirits are pretty plainly unholy, mean and deadly, a good many can plausibly claim to be holy, lordly, and life giving. Only “who proceeds from the Father” and “who spoke by the prophets” serve to pick out the Spirit from the welter.

The “Father” here is the one described as such by the prior two articles of the creed, i.e., the God of Israel whom Jesus so addressed, thereby making himself out to be the Son. And the prophets in question are of course those whose message is part of Israel’s Bible. That is, the Holy Spirit is picked out from the welter of candidates by locating her role in a story most of which is in the Old Testament. We have therefore to identify the Spirit mostly by Old Testament exegesis; and surely the church’s repeated captivities to some alien spirit are in large part caused by her uncertainties about the Old Testament.

The chief problem is thus the one lately discussed under the rubric “communities of interpretation.” The church rightly claims

to be the community that knows how the Bible should be read, because she is the same community of interpretation that put this collected volume together in the first place, and did so for her unique interpretive needs. But of course, the largest part of the volume, and the part that identifies the Spirit, is itself a collection, that at least in general outline antedates the church. Thus the church can maintain her claim to be the Bible's proper community of interpretation only by claiming to be one community with the Israel whose interpretive needs Israel's Bible existed to serve and continues to serve.

This can be done only in one of two ways: by flat-out supersessionism or eschatologically. We have eschewed the former; the latter remains. And so the possibility of identifying the Spirit turns out to be identical with the possibility of the church's claim to be God's people: the church can read the Old Testament, for the identity of the Spirit or for any other reason, just in that she looks forward to being taught exegesis by the 144,000 in the assembly around the throne. And in the meantime, Christian exegetes have no reason either to defer to Rabbinic exegesis or to regard it as a priori wrong.

VII

In the proposal so far, a pattern of argument will have been noted: for Christian theology, it is precisely Israel's rejection of the gospel which makes necessary some such continuation of Israel as we in fact observe. I take it to be a Pauline sort of position: national Israel's rejection of the gospel is one of those events in the history of God's people about which Christian theology must say both that they should not have happened and that if they happened they had to happen. In the time of the church until the Judgment, an Israel according to the flesh must continue precisely because Israel as an identifiable diachronic community did not

believe, lest the gifts and the calling of God prove after all revocable, these not being transferable to a church not embraced in Israel.

When I now turn to the third of current ecumenical theology's favorite rubrics for the church, that she is the body of Christ, we will discover a stronger claim, that a separate continuance of Israel is necessary for there at all to be a time of the church's missionary detour.

The church, according particularly to Paul, is the body of Christ. That is, she is, in this meantime, the object in the world that the world can intend to be intending Christ, she is the possibility of a more than merely conceptual and emotional relation to him, the possibility of a relation according to the flesh. Yet the church is not now simply identical with Christ. She is his body, but he is her head, the subject that presents himself as this body. And the "whole Christ" of which particularly Augustine among the fathers spoke so much, the one reality of Christ with his own, who will in the End be the second person of God's triune life, exists now only in anticipation. *Both* propositions are true: "I am with you always," and "This Jesus, who was taken up *from you* . . . *will* come in the same way"

So the risen Christ is the church and is other than the church. When he is no longer other than the church, the "whole Christ" will be realized and God will be all in all. And had Christ never been other than the church, the time of the mission would not have been and there would never in fact have been the church.

So wherein is the risen Christ other than the church? The suggestion may be surprising, but I commend it to you: in that he is a Jew, in that his proper people is Israel, and in that the continuing community of Israel is an other community than the church. To hold open, as it were, the time of the church, the risen Jew, Jesus the Christ, must not only be embodied as the church, but embodied in the flesh of Israel—until these two are one.

The church now lives by faith and not by “sight.” She presents herself visibly to the world as the body of Christ only in that within her that same Christ is present as an other than she, as a Word she must hear and sacraments she must see and taste and touch. The church is the body of Christ only in that Christ is present within as an other than she, and that indeed only as a sign signified by other signs. The fact that the church is not yet the Kingdom, and that her life is what we call “sacramental” are the same fact.

When the Lord comes “in the same way” as he departed, his presence to faith will be transformed into a presence as directly apprehended as is humans’ presence now to each other—or rather, far more directly. The *totus Christus*, the whole Christ of head and body, will simply be there.

What will constitute the great transformation? Any full attempt to answer that question must include a great deal of revisionary metaphysics and even more poetry. But part of the answer is communal. That even after his Resurrection the Lord is present to faith and not to sight, constitutes the church’s character as an eschatological detour; it is because the Lord has come but nevertheless is yet to come that the church’s life is sacramental, by faith and not by sight. The Lord’s return will restore his people to the main road, ending the detour. But that is to say, his return will terminate the separation between the church and Israel according to the flesh.

The church does not now see her Lord in the flesh because he is a Jew according to the flesh and the church is separated from Jews according to the flesh. What the Lord’s coming will dismiss is the generic ungodliness of the church’s dominating gentiles and continuing Judaism’s disbelief.

When Christ’s advent has been accomplished in such fashion as to make further coming superfluous, there will indeed be no more role for Judaism as a community separate from the church, or for the church as a community separate from Israel; both will be

superseded in these roles. As the Kingdom is present in heaven, the “one hundred forty-four thousand...of the people of Israel” and the “great multitude...from every nation” are one church in the praise of the Lamb. And the risen Jesus, the head of the *totus Christus*, is, after all, one of the hundred and forty-four thousand.

I have given lectures where I was more sure of my positions. Perhaps it is *not* possible, without dilution of the church’s teaching about Christ, to avoid supersessionism; then the church faces a perhaps fatal choice. Supersessionism is anyway not avoided simply by Christians saying they have now decided it is ok for Jews to go on their own way; we have to say *why* God has maintained both the synagogue and the church, and the reasons must be propositions of specifically Christian theology. Perhaps my attempts to discern such reasons fail. Let their failure inspire others to do better.

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