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Paul at the Intersection between Continuity and Discontinuity – On Paul's Place in early Judaism and Christianity as well as in Christian-Jewish Dialogue Today

In present-day theology and Christian-Jewish dialogue, some very remarkable developments can be observed. In these, questions regarding Paul have a status of their own. Paul is being situated more within the multifaceted Judaism of the Second Temple period than was the case over a long a period of time in exegetical tradition. In situating him in early Judaism and Christianity, the fundamental word is continuity. At the same time, Paul is a decisive factor of discontinuity in the two communities' process of separation, which took longer and was more complex than exegesis and theology argued for a long time. Thus a new openness for Paul has come about in Christian-Jewish dialogue, and some very remarkable Jewish statements are part of this development.

If, guided by fundamental theology, one looks at the present state of the discussion as a Catholic ecumenical theologian in particular with reference to the keyword on the “New Perspective on Paul”, the systematic theologian very soon discovers two things: 1. Systematic theology is only very gradually perceiving the systematic relevance of insights in the “New Perspective on Paul” that are finding exegetical expression.¹ 2. The hermeneutic problem, which Phil Cunningham formulated as “interaction that occurs between the scriptural texts and readers of today who are grappling with the radically ‘new situation’ after the Shoah and after *Nostra Aetate*”, comes to the fore.²

In the following attempt to discuss the systematic relevance of a few of the aspects of the current discussion on the “New Perspective on Paul”, I shall concentrate on the contributions to the 2009 Leuven colloquium, “New Perspectives on Paul and the Jews”, without entirely neglecting other literature. I do not conceal the fact that I am not inclined to see symmetry in the relationship between continuity and discontinuity where “Paul and Judaism” are

¹ Similarly Hans-Joachim Sander, Sharing God with others or dividing God from powerlessness – a late-modern challenge by the heterotopian experience of the new Paul: Manuscript (August 2009), 2.

² Cf. Philip A. Cunningham, Paul's Letters and the Relationship between the People of Israel and the Church Today: Manuscript (June 2009), p. 4.

concerned. My tendency is rather to assume that continuity dominates and is the foundation.³ My own hermeneutic option is close to Phil Cunningham's approach, but will be further developed.

A hermeneutic reassurance

Just as in general, many theological voices and positions and even theologies found expression in the whole of the Christian Bible made up of the Tenach and the New Testament, so in the Pauline writings there is also a pluralism of statements about Israel, the Jews and the Torah that are in tension with one another. The exegesis of the Pauline writings has to find the meaning of each of the individual passages in itself and in its context in the respective letter. When exegesis refers to the whole body of Pauline writings, the statements in 1 Thess 2:14-16 and Rom 9f.; 11:1.11.18.26 for example stand out in sharp tension with one another. Their meaning for us is not already given by showing the individual biographical context of Paul and the very different situations of the community in Thessalonica and in Rome, which he is addressing. So is it necessary to look at the whole of Pauline writings, of the New Testament and finally of the entire Bible when interpreting theologically the abiding tension between Paul's two statements?⁴ But what could this “whole“ be? It seems that the interpretation of Scripture as a whole can only be done by turning the old rule of interpretation, according to which the Scriptures must be *interpreted* by the Scriptures, more precisely into the instruction to *criticize* the Scriptures by means of the Scriptures. During the previous Leuven colloquium on “Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel“ in the year 2000, Hendrik Hoet went in the direction of this principle with a hermeneutic assurance,⁵ which linked exegesis and Christian-Jewish dialogue in a double way: the study of the New Testament calls upon every honest exegete to dialogue with Jewish colleagues, just as present-day dialogue with Jewish colleagues demands renewed study of the New Testament. Respect for Jewish companions on the way forbids every anti-Jewish interpretation of the New Testament. It forces present-day

³ In its content, this thesis is close to Mark D. Nanos' “working hypothesis that Paul was probably Torah-observant”, in: Paul's Relationship to Torah in Light of His Strategy „to Become Everything to Everyone“ (1 Corinthians 9:19-23): Manuscript (June 2009), p. 6. The Catholic systematic theologian accepted the admonition of Michael Bachmann, a Protestant colleague and exegete, in: Paulus, Israel und die Völker. Hermeneutische und exegetische Notizen: Manuscript (June 2009), 2-4, that exegetical work on details can discuss all too general evaluations.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Nanos' sketch of the “exegetical issues”, *ibid.*, 23f.

⁵ Hendrik Hoet, “Abraham is our Father” (John 8:39). The Gospel of John and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue, in: Reimund Bieringer/Didier Pollefeyt/Frederique Vanden Castele-Vanneuville (Eds.), Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel. Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000, Royal Van Gorcum, Assen/Netherlands 2001, 187-201.

exegesis and theology to revise traditional statements, which were often marked by anti-Jewish feelings. Hoet suggests placing the text that is burdened by anti-Judaism into the “dynamic of the Spirit” as a way out of the dilemma of any anti-Judaism found in the New Testament or nourished by the New Testament: “Every word of the Scriptures must be understood against the horizon of the whole 'dynamic' of the entire Bible. But who will define that? ... We are not looking for a canon inside the canon, which might function as a criterion of the right interpretation of the Scriptures, but we do plead for due consideration of the inner coherence of the entire Scriptures – and the coherence is the God of life and love. Does the God we get to know through the Scriptures not teach us that true and just is everything that leads to the life of all God’s beloved?”⁶ Hoet expresses his conviction “that a scientific, honest and open-minded literary study of the Bible, in dialogue with Jews, Christians... can help to trace the 'dynamic' and the inner coherence of the entire Old and New Testament even better”.⁷ As far as it goes, his approach is a valid attempt Hoet finally describes the Bible's coherence and center of meaning as follows: “One may say that the Biblical logic reasons fundamentally in terms of family relations of father and children, of brothers and sisters: man is revealed as ‘God child’ called to live together with those from other peoples as one big family of God’s children. The ‘logic’ seems to me to be the ground of the ‘inner coherence’ or the ‘dynamic’ and the ‘spirit’ of the Bible.”⁸

But could the biblical family logic with its hermeneutic function as the Bible's center of meaning not also turn against a text such as 1 Thess 2:14-16? Perhaps after all one must look at this more energetically. In biblical thinking, doing has priority: fulfilling the law, practicing the good, love. This love contains a wisdom that has to do with fundamental respect in the face of the otherness of the Other.⁹ When in the history of their interpretation, certain passages such as 1 Thess 2:14-16 and their interpretations have led to disregard of the Other, they must be exposed to criticism. Can we deny that this is the case for the passage in the First Letter to the Thessalonians?¹⁰ The danger that Christian exegesis and theology has a hidden

⁶ Ibid. 196f: On further acceptance of this criterion, cf. Hans Hermann Henrix, *Canon – Revelation – Reception: Problems of a Biblically Oriented Theology in the Face of Israel*, in: *ibid.*, 534-548, especially 541-546.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Hans-Joachim Sander expresses this in his style of language as follows: “If a person cannot share God’s justice to him or to her with others then the whole idea of justification will lead to bankruptcy of this person.” Sander, *ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ Roger Burggraeve argued analogously at the 2000 Leuven colloquium: *Biblical Thinking As The Wisdom of Love*, in: Reimund Bieringer e.a., *ibid.*, 202-225, 209 on Jn 8:31-59.

latent disposition towards anti-Judaism, at times with fine ramifications, still exists. This requires a “hermeneutic of distrust”. It can be experienced for example when statements in the New Testament that are critical of Jews and their intensified Christian interpretation are discussed in dialogue with Jewish colleagues or when they are read by them in virtual dialogue with the Christian history of interpretation. Then it is possible to encounter – as for example with Amy-Jill Levine – a Jewish way of reading that experiences a passage such as 1 Thess 2:14-16 as a “slap in the face”.¹¹

At the 2000 Leuven colloquium, James D.G. Dunn warned not to take the issue of anti-Judaism for example in the Gospel according to John too lightly. The issue may not be denied or suppressed. Rather, serious work must be done on it. And this not only because it reminds us of the still virulent anti-Judaism of the Christian tradition that followed it, but also because “it reminds us that revelation comes through dirty hands and inadequate human language, and that the all too vigorous altercations of the first century were an integral part of the emerging identity of Christianity and remain fundamental to its continuing self-understanding.”¹²

What does it mean that revelation – put harshly – came to us “through dirty hands”? The acknowledgment of Scripture's historical conditioning and thus also of that of the Pauline texts includes the recognition of the historical conditioning of revelation, which is embodied in the texts of Scripture. Revelation cannot be separated from its historically conditioned form. It is not accessible in a “timeless core” that can be cut out of its historical conditioning. There is no such thing as “pure” revelation. The Bible is at one and the same time the Word of God and the word of human beings. Revelation “plays” in the pluralism of statements within the Bible, in the “vis-à-vis” of the biblical text and its post-biblical interpretation, in the dialogue between the canonical Scripture and the community in Judaism and Christianity that reads and lives it as canon. And in the relationship between the canonical text and the reading, studying and proclaiming community there is something other, something that is “beyond”. The canonical text comes from “somewhere else”; its meaning or significance has become manifest in human experience, and at the same time, it is “broken”. This is borne out in the

¹¹ Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew. The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*, Harper Collins Publisher – New York 2007, 95-99. At the 2000 Leuven colloquium, Adele Reinartz spoke of the “slap in the face” through Johannine talk about “the Jews”: ‘Jews’ and Jews in the Fourth Gospel, in: *ibid.*, 341-356, 341: “in my own initial encounters this... the term ‘Jew’ (in its Johannine use) felt like a slap in the face”.

¹² James D.G. Dunn, *The Embarrassment of History: Reflections on the Problem of 'Anti-Judaism' in the Fourth Gospel*, in: *ibid.*, 47-67, 66.

insight “that revelation never happens in a straightforward way, but always takes place in and through interpretation that needs to be critically questioned, which in turn will give cause for shifting, even contradictory, interpretations.”¹³

Theologically, the efforts regarding the “New Perspective on Paul” have a part in preparing the way for revelation to us today. Precisely through their critical objection against conventional perspectives in interpreting Paul, they draw attention to an “inappropriate human language” and perhaps also to the “dirty hands”, through which revelation came.¹⁴ This must be kept in mind.

“Call rather than Conversion” - Continuity's Fundamental Category

In his enlightening outline of the emergence of Jewish interest in Paul, Daniel Langton draws attention to the fact that Robert Travers-Herford drew a parallel between the rabbinic story of the stubborn Gehazi, whose master visits Damascus in order to bring him back on the right path, and the report on the “conversion” of Paul to Christianity in Damascus.¹⁵ By speaking of the apostle Paul's experience close to Damascus as “conversion”, Travers-Herford corresponds with a broad consensus in Christian understanding of Paul. The three reports in the Acts of the Apostles on Paul's experience outside of Damascus (Acts 9:1-19; 22:4-16 and 26:9-19), as well as Paul's own description of it in Gal 1:11-17, have generally been read under the title “conversion”. This word normally characterized Paul's experience as a change of religion from “Judaism” to “Christianity”. It was said that Paul turned away from “Judaism”, turned his back on it, and turned towards a different religion, Christianity. And in fact, the event that has been transmitted does testify to a dramatic change: the Jew Saul is so attached to his Jewish faith that he zealously persecutes those who believe in Christ, for which his agreement to the killing of Stephen, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:1) stands, as does his intention to persecute those in Damascus who believe in Christ (Acts 9:1-2). The nature of the Damascus experience as Paul's being suddenly overwhelmed seems to justify even more understanding it as “conversion”.

¹³ Roger Burggraeve, *ibid.*, 213.

¹⁴ Nanos draws attention to this in his constant argument around ethical problems in the dominant interpretation of Paul in 1 Cor 9:19-23: Nanos, *ibid.*, particularly 24-27.

¹⁵ David Langton, *Some Historical Observations Regarding the Emergence of a Jewish Interest in the Apostle Paul and its Relation to Christian Pauline Scholarship: Manuscript* (June 2009), p. 1 (the rabbinic story can be found in Sotah 47a and Sanhedrin 107b).

And yet, in a whole chapter precisely on the Damascus experience, entitled antithetically as “Call rather than Conversion”, Krister Stendahl, who prepared the way and opened up the “New Perspective on Paul”, corrects what “we often think we hear or recognize in Paul”.¹⁶ According to Stendahl, if one reads the reports mentioned more closely one discovers “a greater continuity between 'before' and 'after'. Here is not that change of ‘religion’ that we commonly associate with the word *conversion*. Serving the one and same God, Paul receives a new and special calling in God’s service to bring his message to the nations. All the reports emphasize this commission, not the conversion. Rather than being 'converted', Paul was called to the specific task – made clear to him by his experience of the risen Lord – of apostleship for the Gentiles, one hand-picked through Jesus Christ on behalf of the one God of Jews and Gentiles.”¹⁷ In his exegetical study of Paul's report of his call in Gal 1:13-16, Stendahl draws attention to the fact that the apostle describes his experience, for example with the phrase about his having been chosen “from his mother's womb”, in “concepts belonging to a prophetic vocation” in Isaiah (49:1 and 6) and Jeremiah (1:5). Just as there is no break in the prophetic vocation, the Damascus experience does not give rise to a break from “Judaism” in Paul. The concept of conversion stands for the break and the mode of thinking where a change of religion is concerned. For Thomas Blanton, the model of “conversion to Christianity” is linked to polemic against Judaism, from which he firmly excludes Paul in his analysis of the Second Letter to the Corinthians.¹⁸ So instead of a break and a change of religion, there is with Paul “a great continuity between 'before' and 'after’”. Together with Stendahl, I believe that calling the Damascus experience “call/vocation” rather than “conversion” is an appropriate short phrase that expresses the fundamental flow of continuity which is there, even with all the drama and change that this event and its consequences contain.¹⁹

¹⁶ Krister Stendahl, *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden. Anfragen an das abendländische Christentum*, München 1978, 17; the chapter “Eher Berufung als Bekehrung” [“Call rather than Conversion”]: 17-37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸ Thomas R. Blanton, *Paul’s Covenantal Theology in 2 Cor 2:14–7:4*: Manuscript (June 2009), particularly p. 10, footnote 26.

¹⁹ Langton draws attention to Leo Baeck who in his understanding of Paul also rejected calling the Damascus event “conversion”: “In general, one speaks of Paul's conversion. But this expression is insufficient. What happened in Paul's life was not a conversion in the usual sense of the word, but rather a revolution, a transformation”: Leo Baeck, *Paulus, die Pharisäer und das Neue Testament*, Frankfurt 1961, 7-37 (= *Der Glaube des Paulus*, 1952), 9. In analogy to Stendahl, the German New Testament scholar Josef Blank explained Gal 1:15f. “within the category of 'prophetic vocation’”, and he considered it to be “problematic to speak of the 'conversion' of Paul and to place this aspect unilaterally in the forefront”. He continued: “Paul did not convert from lack of faith to faith, he was not an unbeliever...; nor did he convert from an immoral way of life to a moral way of life; Paul was not a bad, immoral human being; it is not even possible to say that he converted from Judaism to Christianity, because at that time, Christianity did not yet exist as an independent reality separate

Nevertheless, in his very perspicacious contribution, “Salvation in Paul's Judaism”, Michael F. Bird spoke of a “pre-conversion life in pharisaic Judaism” and thought: “His conversion was, in its immediate setting, a transference from one Jewish sect to another.”²⁰ And in what follows, he again returns to the concept of “conversion”.²¹ However, Bird does not use the term “conversion” in an uninhibited way that lacks all questions, but rather rejects its possible misunderstanding in the sense of a complete discontinuity; he speaks of “a transference from one Jewish sect to another”. And he precedes his study of Paul's identity and of the socio-religious place of the Pauline communities with the question that needs to be clarified: “In his conversion/call did Paul simply shift from a pharisaic sect to a messianic sect *within Judaism*, or has he now been dislocated, religiously and socially, *from Judaism*?”²² Bird speaks at the same time of “conversion” and “call”. He considers the apostle's biography to be “a matter of seismic changes in personal identity”. For him, Paul's identity underwent significant transformations in thought, and yet Bird does not deny continuity. For he notes: “that the new identity is continuous with his Israelite ancestry”, to which of course he immediately adds: “but also consciously distinct from it”.²³ I understand Bird as meaning that for him the continuity remains important; but I doubt that it is also an (asymmetrical) fundamental category for him. And calling the Damascus event “vocation/call” rather than “conversion”, stands for continuity as a fundamental category.

A Jewish Missionary to the Nations – Discontinuity in Continuity

John Pawlikowski sums up the understanding of the Pauline vocation as follows, referring thereby to his Chicago colleague Robin Scroggs' important research results: “The Pauline missionary movement, as Paul understood it, was a Jewish mission which focused on the

from Judaism.” Josef Blank, *Paulus – Jude und Völkerapostel. Als Frage an Juden und Christen*, in: Markus Barth e.a., *Paulus – Apostat oder Apostel? Jüdische und christliche Antworten*, Regensburg 1977, 147-172, 152.

²⁰ Michael F. Bird, *Salvation in Paul's Judaism?: Manuscript* (June 2009), p. 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7,9,14.

²² *Ibid.*, 7. Similarly, Thomas Söding also vacillates between conversion and call/vocation: “Ich lebe, aber nicht ich, ...“ (Gal 2,19). *Die theologische Physiognomie des Paulus: Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 38 (2009), 119- 134, 133: “Paul looks back (2 Cor 4) to the vision of Damascus..., but he characterizes his conversion and vocation in such a way that all Christians' formative insight of faith can be mirrored in it.”

Similarly, Jens Schröter, *Paulus in der Apostelgeschichte: Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 38 (2009) 135- 148, 138, uses both “conversion” and “vocation” and says in a note: “‘Conversion’ and ‘vocation’ mean two perspectives of this event, which must not be played out against one another.” (146)

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

Gentiles as the proper object of God's call to his people."²⁴ One could apply Paul's declaration of intention for redemption through Jesus Christ in Gal 3:14 to his apostolic service: "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles". Paul is called to go to the Gentiles and to announce to them that they are included in the "salvation of the people of God". His apostolate is characterized by the "inclusion in the community of salvation" of the Gentiles. According to Michael Bachmann, the Gentiles should "be included in the community of salvation precisely as non-Jews".²⁵ Paul is the "apostle of the Gentiles; in the Letter to the Romans, he speaks of his obligation to both, to Greeks and to Barbarians, but in fulfilling this obligation, he is very conscious of the Jews and of their role in God's plan (Rom 1:14-16). In the Acts of the Apostles, a programmatic picture is drawn of the Jew Paul, the former Pharisee, who brings the Gospel to the world of the Gentiles, and this only ends when Paul reaches Rome, the center of power of the Gentile world." Paul is interested above all "in ensuring the rights of the Gentile converts to be entirely and truly heirs of God's promises to Israel. Their rights are based solely on faith in Jesus Christ."²⁶ His "apostolate for the Gentiles" means that he was called and chosen by Jesus Christ for the sake of the one God of Jews and Gentiles. This apostolate was carried by the "conviction that the Gentiles become part of God's people without having to pass through the Law. This is Paul's secret revelation and his knowledge."²⁷ Stendahl even sees in the change of name from Saul to Paul - often cited in favor of understanding the Damascus event as a "conversion" - an indication of Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles. The call outside of Damascus is not what triggered the change of name. Rather, the report in Acts 13 about the conflict with a magician who passed himself off as a prophet by the name of Bar Jesus/Elymas before the Roman pro-consul Sergius Paulus of Cyprus, combines the two names when verse 9 says: "But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit... said". From this event on, the apostle is always called Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, and this name accompanies him on his further journey of bringing the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Stendahl: the change of name symbolizes "this move of the focal point... From now on, Rome is the 'magnet'".²⁸ And Rome stands for the world of the Gentiles.

²⁴ John T. Pawlikowski, A Christian-Jewish Dialogue Model in Light of New Research on Paul's Relationship with Judaism: Manuscript (June 2009), 3.

²⁵ Michael Bachmann, *ibid.*, 11; similarly: 2 and 15.

²⁶ Stendahl, *ibid.*, 10f.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23; similarly Schröter, *ibid.*, 137.

Paul is a missionary for Jesus Christ because he recognized the God of Israel, “his” God, working in the Christ event, and in fidelity to this God of Israel, he proclaimed the Gospel to the Gentiles as an “Israelite”.²⁹ He did this in “Jewish categories”.³⁰ Thus Phil Cunningham and Michael Bird have good reason to formulate Paul's call/vocation and task as that of the “Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles” and the “Jewish Christian Apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles”.³¹

Law or Torah and Christ – an Antithesis in Paul's Writing?

The letters of the “Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles” are so full of tension that – as Michael Bachmann soberly notes - even in the discussion under the title of “New Perspective on Paul” no “far reaching consensus” has been reached. Something analogous can also be said about the contributions to the 2009 Leuven colloquium. On the one hand for example, Michael Bird in his contribution, after all his underlining of Paul's continuity with Judaism ultimately marks quite strongly the discontinuity. He offered an interpretation of 2 Cor 3 and of Rom 10:4 according to which he believes it to be obvious “that Paul emphasized the discontinuity between the epochs of Christ and Torah/Moses”.³² Indeed, between the two, the “antithesis” reigns, so that the statement in the Letter to the Romans saying that *telos gar nomou Christos* 10:4 must be understood as the end of the law. On the other hand, Michael Bachmann presented a Pauline result with a very different emphasis. According to him, the appearance of the concept of *nomos* 118 times in the *corpus paulinum* certainly does include harsh comments criticizing the law and without question statements on the law that are not positive. But with all that, Paul also speaks very positively about the Mosaic law, so that the often expressed impression of a “radical criticism of the law” is not in accord with the Pauline statements themselves. According to Bachmann, Paul is not talking about “complete 'freedom from the law'”. “There is no question” regarding the emphasis in Rom 10:4 on “the Christ event”, but for Bachmann this can “hardly be translated as the 'end/ending of the law'”; instead, Paul is talking about a teleological reality, so that Christ (is) rather to be understood as “the goal of the law”.³³

²⁹ Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, Paulus im Judentum seiner Zeit. Der Heidenapostel aus Israel in „neuer Sicht“: Internationale katholische Zeitschrift *Communio* 38 (2009), 108- 118, 111.

³⁰ Franz Mußner, Traktat über die Juden, München 1979, 235.

³¹ Cunningham, *ibid.*, 7 and Bird, *ibid.*, 8.

³² Bird, *ibid.*, 18.

³³ Bachmann, *ibid.*, 12; cf. also 17.

Mark Nanos' contribution to Paul's understanding of the law and the Torah is full of pathos when he says that an antithesis exists neither between the Torah and Jesus nor between the Torah and Paul. Right at the beginning he says: "The traditional and almost undisputed answer is that he renounced Torah-observance for disciples of Christ — except to imitate Jewish behavior to evangelize among Jews. Yet to me it seems more logical that a Jew, such as Paul claims to be (2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5-6), who is seeking to convince fellow Jews as well as Gentiles to turn to Jesus as the one representing the ideals and promises of Torah, would uphold the quintessential basis of that message, that is, he would observe Torah (cf. Rom 1:1-5; 3; 9:32—11:36; 15:8-9; 1 Cor 15:1-28; Gal 3:19; 5:14)."³⁴ And Nanos develops this position, saying that he considers interpreting the phrase, "I have become all things to all people" in 1 Cor 9:22 in the sense of a "rhetorical adaptability" to be a better solution.

Not only the positive statements in Rom 13:9f. or Gal 5:13f. alluding to the commandment to love, give Bachmann as well reason to see it as problematic when exegetical understanding considers Paul's criticism of the law to be a "call to (complete) 'freedom from the law'".³⁵ Bachmann understands the passage in Gal 3:19f., that is often cited as a radical criticism of the law by Paul, contextually in the sense that it is the "one" God who causes "the Christ event as well as the law, and since according to v. 8 the Christ event ... applies to 'all nations', the God of the law (or of the giving of the law) is at the same time the God of the whole world." What Bachmann says is thereby in accordance with the fact that God's oneness is also the basis for Paul's proclamation.³⁶ Of course, the law that came from the one and only God cannot give life, which the Christ event can (Gal 2:1f.).³⁷ Bachmann sums up his results on the concept of *nomos* by saying: "The term *nomos* is normally really not used negatively by Paul. But the Christ event makes it possible to see that being convinced that the law itself can

³⁴ Nanos, *ibid.*, 1. Analogously, Hans-Joachim Sander can say: "The new perspective brings logic to Paul's debate with Peter and the other representatives of the Christian community in Jerusalem on the one hand and his continuing support for Jewish religious positions on the other hand.": Sander, *ibid.*, 16.

³⁵ The same understanding can be found with Nanos, *The Myth of the 'Law-Free' Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews*: www.marknanos.com/Myth-Lawfree-12-3-08.pdf (December 10, 2008), p. 6, when he speaks of "the ideals of Torah that Paul upholds to be central, the love of one's neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14)."

³⁶ On this, cf. Hans Hermann Henrix, *Gottes Ja zu Israel. Ökumenische Studien christlicher Theologie*, Berlin/Aachen 2005, 103-120 (= „Für uns der einzige Gott, der Vater, ... und der einzige Kyrios Jesus Christus“ [1 Kor 8,6]. Zur christlichen Rede von Gott und Jesus Christus), as well as Hubert Frankemölle, *Frühjudentum und Urchristentum. Vorgeschichte – Verlauf – Auswirkungen* (4. Jahrhundert v.Chr. bis 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.), Stuttgart 2006, 286-289.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

transmit 'life' is an illusion ... On the other hand, the Christ event (which somehow has to do with the love of Jesus [see e.g. Gal 2:20]) leads to the Christian's loving correspondence with the Torah – at least that is what Paul thinks! (see again e.g. Gal 5:13f.).”³⁸ In his detailed examination of the Pauline phrase *erga nomou*, in the context of which Paul speaks of the commandment of circumcision, Bachmann also comes to this result. The negative connotation of this phrase aims at not imposing upon Gentiles or Gentile Christians rules such as that of circumcision. “It is precisely not a condition for inclusion in the community of salvation that such halakhot be accepted by non-Jews and thus also not that non-Jews become Jews. The condition is rather Christ alone or faith in Christ (cf. e.g. Gal 2:16f.).” Bachmann distinguishes very firmly between the halakhot mentioned as rules or ritual regulations in the sense of “boundary markers”, and doing, so that he sums up his thinking on the Pauline understanding of “justification” as follows: “Justification' does not demand of Gentiles or Gentile Christians the acceptance of Jewish 'boundary markers', as if these also applied to non-Jews; inclusion in the community of salvation does not go by way of the detour of halakhically regulated inclusion in Judaism and is thus universally possible.”³⁹

Bachmann's situating the law and Christ does not turn their position towards one another into an “antithesis” but rather, with all clear distinction, also emphasizes proximity and positivity between the law or the Torah and Christ. For a Catholic ecumenical theologian, this position brings to mind a current discussion which began with the Jesus book by Pope Benedict XVI.

After causing irritations in the Catholic-Jewish relationship through his 2008 Good Friday prayer and the decree lifting the excommunication of the auxiliary bishops of the Society of Pius X, Pope Benedict in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* has a literary dialogue with Rabbi Jacob Neusner.⁴⁰ The subject of this dialogue is the Sermon on the Mount. For the pope, “the majority of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:17-7:27)” after the “programmatic introduction by the Beatitudes... gives so to speak the Messiah's Torah” (p. 132). “The title and interpretative key” to this Torah of the Messiah is “a word that surprises us over and over again and that clearly and unequivocally states God's fidelity to God's own self and the

³⁸ Ibid., 14.

³⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger/Benedikt XVI., *Jesus von Nazareth. Erster Teil von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklärung*, Freiburg 2007; the pope's conversation with Jacob Neusner and his book, *Ein Rabbi spricht mit Jesus. Ein jüdisch-christlicher Dialog*, München 1997, is on pages 131-160. The passages quoted from it will be indicated in the text in brackets.

fidelity of Jesus to the faith of Israel: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill...' (Mt 5:17-19)." (p. 133) In the first part of his conversation with Neusner on the question regarding the Sabbath, the pope explains what the expression concerning the Sermon on the Mount as Torah of the Messiah means. Here the pope first corrects a misunderstanding that has often come up, as if by his saying that "the Sabbath exists for man and not man for the Sabbath", Jesus had "broken open a blinkered legalistic praxis and given instead a more generous and liberated view" (p. 138). In the conflict around the Sabbath, the issue is "not a form of morality, but rather a highly theological, or to say it more precisely, a Christological text" (p. 142). Benedict is brought to this result by Neusner's sharp objection to seeing Jesus taking "the place of the Torah". Benedict picks up Neusner's objection: "With this, the real core of the conflict is laid bare. Jesus understands himself as the Torah – as the Word of God in person" (p. 143). And picking up both Matthew's word, "Here is something greater than the temple" (Mt 12:6, p. 140), and that of Neusner, Pope Benedict speaks of Jesus' claim "to be himself the Torah and the Temple in person" (p. 144). He takes up other expressions concerning Jesus as Torah from his dialogue with Jacob Neusner and seems to be en route, so to speak, to an unusual key category or even to a new title for Christ: "the living Torah of God" (p. 206), or "Jesus is the Torah itself" (p. 364). When Benedict says that "Jesus sees himself as the Torah", and when he reaffirms his statement by adding, "- as the Word of God in person", his statement is transparent in view of the "mighty prologue to the Gospel according to John" (p. 143). By calling Jesus Christ the "Torah in person", the "living Torah of God" or the "Torah itself" - one could also speak of the Torah incarnate – Benedict traced a path that should be continued in theological discussion, if it is to be kept free of positions of substitution and supersessionism. Thus, when confronted with the fact that Rom 9-11, for example, does not appear in Pope Benedict's book on Jesus, one must examine whether the characterization of Jesus Christ as the Torah in person is close to Pauline statements. But one must also assess whether this characterization contains a potentially critical question to exegesis, theology and the Church. Over and beyond that, reflection on soteriology could raise the question whether the Christian certainty is correct in believing that Jewish life according to Israel's Torah stands under God's blessing and is thus salvific, which would raise theological questions as regards "mission towards the Jews". Here, let me simply allude to the theological *opinio* that in further reflection on Jesus Christ as the living Torah and on Paul's championing for hope as

regards Israel, it seems possible to justify this, particularly based on the Letters to the Galatians and the Romans.⁴¹

Jesus Christ as the “Torah in Person”: a systematic Characterization in Proximity to Paul?

Understanding Jesus Christ as “living Torah”, as the “Torah in person”, contains a statement about continuity with Israel, about the abiding reference to Israel. For the Torah is Israel's Torah, which the God of Israel entrusted and gave to his chosen people Israel as his covenantal partner. At the same time, a markedly Christological finality is inscribed into the Torah, which in its content is close to Rom 10:4, where Paul – thus with Michael Bachmann – speaks of Christ with a teleological tendency as the “goal of the law”.⁴² In his contribution, Mark Nanos not only recapitulated the Pauline understanding of Jesus as the “goal” of the Torah – agreeing exegetically (as a Jewish exegete), not as a profession of faith; he also alluded indirectly to Rom 10:4 and spoke of Jesus “as the one representing the ideals and promises of Torah”.⁴³ In characterizing Jesus Christ as the “Torah in person”, one can hear a call that is influenced by Paul.

What the Jewish interpreter Mark Nanos sees as exegetically possible based on Paul, is alarming to Jacob Neusner in his exegesis of the relationship between Jesus and the Torah in the Gospel according to Matthew. For Neusner sees Jesus taking the place of the Torah and standing at the height of God in the Sermon on the Mount. Pope Benedict uses this Jewish way of reading the Jesus of Matthew by taking it up affirmatively: Jesus has the authority of the Torah and of the giver of the Torah. His Torah is the “Torah of the Messiah”. Jesus as the Torah become a person may “interpret the Mosaic order of God's commandments in such a radically new way as only the lawgiver – God himself – does” (148). It is a new interpretation, the transmission of which to the Gentiles was the subject of “the conflict between Paul and the so-called Judaists”. (150) The pope supports its right to this by quoting Paul in Gal 5:13: “You are called to freedom” (151). For those who follow Jesus, “the search for the will of God in communion with Jesus is an orientation” in understanding and living the

⁴¹ Hans Hermann Henrix's contribution, *The Son of God became a Human Being as a Jew. On taking the Jewishness of Jesus seriously for Christology* (as yet unpublished manuscript) examines in what way this title should be taken up in soteriological discussion.

⁴² Bachmann, *ibid.*, 12.

⁴³ Nanos, *ibid.*, p. 1 and footnote 3.

teachings of the Torah of Moses (cf. 152). Communion with Jesus then brings clearly into view the “word that surprises us over and over again and that clearly and unequivocally states God's fidelity to God's own self and the fidelity of Jesus to the faith of Israel: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill...' (Mt 5:17-19)” (133). According to Paul this would mean that he who was born of a woman is “subject to the law” (Gal 4:4). Thus we may understand the characterization of Jesus Christ as the “Torah in person” in proximity to important fundamental Pauline statements.

Jesus Christ as the Torah incarnate – a title critical of tradition

The characterization of Jesus as the Torah in person, which seems to be a title, means positively that Jesus fulfilled the Torah of God, that he was a son of Israel who faithfully adhered to the Torah, and that the Torah became incarnate in him and has its “goal“ in him. Over and beyond this central positive content, however, the title also has considerable critical significance. For it shows the problematic nature of a tradition in theology and the Church that was and is in danger of a persistent or fundamental “no” to Israel's Torah, not least through recourse to Paul. This is not only the danger of a proclamation and a theology with slogans like “freedom from the law” and a “Torah-free” Gospel when these are exaggerated and turned into a radical antithesis. It is also the danger of a relative lack of relationship, which separates Jesus and the Torah by saying that the Torah belongs to the Jews, Jesus to the Christians.

Thomas of Aquinas could acknowledge: “*lex vetus manifestabat praecepta legis naturae*”, in other words, that the old law contains natural law; but “the old law” is only valid insofar as it belongs to natural law; however, the supplements in the “old law” that go beyond natural law and are not imposed upon the other nations for their observance are only binding for the Jewish people and aim at preparing it for the coming of Christ; with the coming of Christ, these laws are dead, and for Christians they even bring death (cf. *Summa theologica* 1/II q. 98,5; q. 103,4 or 104,3).⁴⁴ A long position in theology and the Church corresponds with Aquinas' position, which only acknowledged the Torah as God's teaching insofar as it was of a universal nature. In such a tradition, the Decalogue was not qualified as God's teaching

⁴⁴ For the discussion on this position cf. e.g.: Klaus Müller, *Tora für die Völker. Die noachidischen Gebote und Ansätze zu ihrer Rezeption im Christentum*, Berlin 1994, 210-213, as well as Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise. Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, Grand Rapids/Michigan 2004, 208.

because it was God's teaching from Sinai to Moses and his people, but because it is in accord with natural law. However, not only the Decalogue's relationship to revelation and its nature as a document and seal of the Sinai covenant were thereby forfeited, but also its relationship to Jesus as a follower of the Torah and of the Decalogue. The theological understanding of Jesus Christ as the Torah in person claims precisely this relationship between Jesus and the Torah.

Thus, understanding Jesus as the Torah in person does not work as an uncritical connecting motive. For it not only stands critically against a tradition of separation between Jesus and the Torah. It also challenges the present-day Christian-Jewish encounter to clarify the understanding of Torah. The discussion around the “New Perspective on Paul” applies not least to this question. The scope of that discussion on how *nomos* is to be understood was already mentioned. And I cannot conceal that what Michael Bird said about “Paul’s matrix of... Torah-free Gentile mission”⁴⁵ does not quite convince me. Here, the weight of Mark Nanos' objection against a “Torah-free lifestyle” in Paul's writing should be given greater attention. And here I feel closer to Michael Bachmann's recourse to the positive statements in Rom 13:9f. or Gal 5:13f., which allude to the commandment to love and which call upon Christians to be in “loving correspondence with the Torah”. His theo-centric way of reading Gal 3:19-22 in view of the one and only God who “caused the Christ event as well as the law” also seems to me to have an affinity with talk of Christ as the Torah in person. Circumcision is thereby not imposed on the Christians from among the Gentiles, and “non-Jews becoming Jews” is not made a condition.

The Torah is impressed upon Christians and their Church by their Jesus Christ according to Mt 5:17f., but according to Rom 13:9f. and Gal 5:13f., it is also suggested to them paraenetically by the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles Paul. Perhaps one could say: Just as the written Torah is mediated to the Jewish people through the oral Torah of the Talmud, the Torah is mediated to the Church through Jesus and his apostle Paul. Paul van Buren hints at this idea in an inversion of the argument: “we could say that the story of Jesus is the church's Talmud that takes us to Torah. That is why the church can recite the Shema, for Jesus teaches the church to love the Lord our God with all its heart and strength, and to love the neighbor as oneself.” Because he takes Jesus seriously as teacher of the Torah, Paul von Buren comes to

⁴⁵ Michael Bird, *ibid.*, 6.

the ecclesiological conclusion: “The connection between the Torah and the church is and should be fundamental, because Christians can never relate to the real, the living Jesus without the Torah. A Jesus apart from Torah is not the real Jesus... but a figment of pious imagination. Set the church adrift from Torah and you set the church adrift, not merely from its foundations in Israel, but adrift from its foundation in Jesus Christ. The future for the church, if it is to have a future as the church of the God and Father of Jesus Christ, lies in its discovering, precisely as Gentiles and not Israel, the priority of the Torah and so of its Old Testament in its liturgy and for life, and so of its learning to re-read its New Testament always in the light of the Old Testament.”⁴⁶ In his conclusion from a Pauline point of view, Michael Bachmann for his part maintains as ecclesologically relevant: “Paul does not understand the Church (of God) as something anti-Jewish; rather, it comes into being in Judaism and out of Judaism, and is thus according to him something like a universalization of the Jewish people – in any case, a more universal reality, which for this reason is precisely not bound to Jewish 'boundary markers', to *erga nomou*. Aside from these regulations, the ethical stimulus of the law of Moses as well remains with the Christ event and the love of neighbor connected with it, at least in principle.”⁴⁷ The all too pithy talk of a Torah-free Gospel in theology and the Church must be countered with this.

Conclusion

Through their thoughts on the more Johannine characterization of Jesus Christ as the Torah in person, these reflections in the context of the “New Perspective on Paul” seemed rather to lead away from Paul. However, in actual fact, the exegetical discussion of Paul gave rise to them and in their own way, they looked at the issue of continuity and discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity that is discussed in that context. They emphasized the weight of continuity without denying that Paul also was a decisive factor of discontinuity in the drawn-out process of separation between the two communities. To express this, John Pawlikowski used the appealing sentence: “With Paul I would want to argue for significant ‘newness’ in the revelation in Christ.”⁴⁸ Thus Paul represents the double reality of continuity and separation between the Church and Judaism. The discussion of the “New Perspective on Paul” shows clearly that Paul's separation from Judaism was sharpened by a questionable exegesis

⁴⁶ Paul van Buren, *Torah, Israel, Jesus, Church – Today*: <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=791>.

⁴⁷ Bachmann, *ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁸ Pawlikowski, *ibid.*, 10.

of Paul in history and tradition. This sharpening must be corrected and overcome. And Paul gives double support to saying that the separation of those who differ must in no case become rigid as constitutive enmity: first of all through his repeated warning to the Christian community against boasting, not least in the face of Israel, out of which Phil Cunningham in particular spoke;⁴⁹ and then through his admonition in Rom 13:9f. or Gal 5:13f. to really live the commandment of love, which is the main point of the Torah. What certainly applies to the individual Christians has its own relevance for their Churches. In connecting the “new perspective and the new philosophy on Paul”, Hans-Joachim Sander thought about this not least from the point of view of the theology of mission and came thereby to the following surprising thesis that also merits agreement: “If Paul firmly stood against any division in terms of salvation between Jews and Christians which would put those who invent this division in a theological advantage before God then he cannot be the mastermind of a mission to the Jews which sets the Jews in second row before God and other people in third, fourth etc. rank. Then the mission to the Jews is essentially an attack on the universality of the Gospel whose grace is granted by God on his terms alone because this mission denies God the freedom to save them on his grounds and not on the grounds of Christian religious claims. Then a Christian mission of the Jews even proves that Christians picturing themselves as religiously superior to the other is not justified before God. They miss the very point of justification by faith alone and they look to faith as a sort of personal work. A mission which explicitly or implicitly leads to these consequences cannot refer to Paul as its role-model.”⁵⁰ In other words: All of us and all of our communities are on probation where our practice of the ethics of the Torah's main point is concerned; and at the same time, in relation to this lived probation, Paul's “justification through faith alone” is always an “over and beyond”.

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⁴⁹ Cunningham, *ibid.*, 8, 10, 13.

⁵⁰ Sander, *ibid.*, 17: Along with the literature cited by Sander on the philosophy regarding Paul, cf. particularly: Gregor Maria Hoff, *Die paulinische Inversion. Die dekonstruktiven Paulus-Lektüren Slavoy Žižeks und Giorgio Agambens: Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 38 (2009) 179- 190.