
Fraternal Dialogue

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Schalom Ben-Chorin

FRATERNAL DIALOGUE

You are late in coming, but you come...
The great distance... excuses your delay.
Schiller, Pikkolomini, act I, scene i.

The fourth section of the Council’s Statement on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions deals with her relations to Judaism. Part of the text reads, to quote it word by word:

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is so rich, this Sacred Synod wishes to encourage and further their mutual knowledge of, and respect for, one another, a knowledge and respect born principally of biblical and theological studies, but also of fraternal dialogues.

Here, then, the Council claims that mutual understanding and regard are to be encouraged, also that they spring from biblical and theological studies as well as fraternal dialogue. Dialogue and study cannot be separated; the dialogue the Council seeks can rightly be carried on only when the partners have come to know and esteem one another; over and above this, dialogue can decisively further understanding and respect between Jews and Christians.

I am speaking of dialogue between Jews and Christians, not of dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. Only living beings can speak with one another. Institutions, in this instance the Ecclesia and the Synagoga, cannot, because of their very nature, converse; they are completely different entities. The Church, that is to say, the Roman Catholic Church, is a hierarchically structured organization which—its world-wide pluralism notwithstanding—has a clearly recognizable head, the Pope, together with bearers of her teaching office in authoritative positions. Not so the Synagogue. Today, Judaism is at best politically represented by the Jewish Congress; it lacks an effective address in the State. The World Jewish Congress representation simply is not coherent and currents of belief are diverse (the situation of the Catholic Church). Jews can speak with authority only in dialogue more directly with Protestants. It is lacking and individual.

Dialogue can begin only when the individual partners are equal, their collective responses to the common existence and thus for each to respect its brotherly character. Only then, at the moment it arises, can James Parker once stated at a debate; "one shall not bark on dialogue or warning that will yet become Christian blindness and obsession." Jews, by their very way of salvation.

Lately, there has been a theory that the Jewish and the Christian bring the fact that the Jewish way of salvation is not like Micah: "For all the land will be a wilderness, and not be inhabited..." (4:5). This saying of Shazar, at the request of the Christians in 1964. The Christian command of the gospel to ever unjustifiably extend the gospel to every Jew.

This shows how Judaism move. Not
politically represented by such umbrella organizations as the World Jewish Congress; the Jewish people has a center and "place of address" in the State of Israel. But neither the State of Israel nor the World Jewish Congress represent Judaism spiritually; such a representation simply does not, indeed cannot, now exist. The movements and currents of belief within contemporary Judaism are much too diverse (the situation resembles that among Christians outside the Catholic Church); consequently, there is no "court of last resort" that can speak with authority for Judaism as a whole. For Jews, this makes dialogue more difficult with Catholics and, to a certain extent, easier with Protestants. In Protestantism, too, a hierarchical structure is lacking and individual responsibility more strongly emphasized.

Dialogue can be carried on only as a fraternal one, though the individual partners must go beyond their individuality and speak with a collective responsibility that is rooted in their Jewish or Christian existence and thus flows from a collective consciousness. Dialogue loses its brotherly character the moment it becomes a missionary sermon, the moment it aims at conversion. A Christian theologian, the Anglican James Parkes, who himself has engaged in dialogue for decades, once stated at a lecture given in Jerusalem that most Christians embark on dialogue with a mental reservation. They hope that the Jews will yet become Christians, that, after deliverance from their "spiritual blindness and obduracy," they will ask for baptism. On the contrary, Jews, by their very nature, do not even wish Christians to leave their way of salvation to become Jews.

Lately, there has been much talk about "two roads to salvation," the Jewish and the Christian, but those who speak in this vein overlook the fact that these roads run on completely different levels. The Jewish way of salvation is characterized by a saying of the prophet Micah: "For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord, our God, forever and ever" (4:5). This saying was quoted by the President of Israel, Zalman Shazar, at the reception of Pope Paul VI, at Megiddo in January 1964. The Christian, however, always stands under the missionary command of the Risen One: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15).

This shows how dissimilar the planes are on which Christianity and Judaism move. Nor is this dissimilarity evened up by the commission
given to Israel, to become a light unto the nations (Is 49:6), a commission that has always been understood existentially. If Israel became what she was meant to be, "a kingdom of priests and a consecrated nation" (Ex 19:6), the Torah would come out of Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem (Is 2:3), and all the nations would look upon her as the exemplar of a genuine human community. To be sure, both partners to the dialogue were entrusted with a message, yet the character of these messages differs fundamentally. Israel can bear witness to the truth of God only by its life; the Church, however, knows herself called to proclaim the Gospel.

THE GENUINE DIALOGUE

FROM a theological point of view, therefore, dialogue is not possible between the two institutions, while the dialogue between Jews and Christians is our present opportunity. But they cannot take full advantage of this possibility unless they converse with one another out of the depths of their existence, that is, from the Christian to the Jewish existence, and the Jewish to the Christian. What does this really mean? First of all, that we take each other seriously, that we see each other as we truly are.

I speak from twenty-five years of experience. During that time, I had numerous encounters with Christians: Some of our dialogues were conversations within small groups, others panel discussions before audiences numbering hundreds and thousands, still others in the form of extensive correspondence or literary exchanges. From all these, I gained the impression that even the most well-intentioned Christian participants were blocked by images (Leitbilder) incompatible with present-day reality.

Again and again, Christians ask whether the Jewish people, the people of the Old Covenant, is still to be considered the chosen people. Those who answer affirmatively love to quote chapters 9 to 11 of the Epistle to the Romans, according to which God cannot repent of His promises, according to which Israel's election is irrevocable, even though she missed the hour of her Messiah. In this perspective, the question of whether Jews today are conscious of their election is not posed at all. The Jew appears as a theologoumenon, not a present-
day person of flesh and blood. The difficulty of modern Jews in giving existential reality to Israel's election is in no way taken into account. The Jew is addressed as if in his subjectivity he considered himself chosen to the fullest extent, which is, in fact, by no means so. Thus the specific situation of faith, or lack of it, among Jews today is not borne in mind.

Another fallacy that hinders communication is to equate Judaism with the Old Testament. In these dialogues, the Jew is usually treated as the representative of the Ancient Testament, and the fact that Judaism and Old Testament are by no means identical is simply over-looked—either out of ignorance or because it does not fit into one's theological conceptions. Similarly, one cannot disregard 2000 years of Church history, as some fundamentalist sects would wish; if the dialogue is not to be unreal, one must take into account the theological developments from the Church Fathers to the medieval Schoolmen, and up to the theology of our time. To concentrate exclusively on the Gospels would be to miss the reality of the Church, particularly that of the Catholic Church which claims that there are two aspects of her revelation: Scripture and tradition. The same holds true for Judaism which (in contrast to the Karaite sect) recognizes two sources of revelation: the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinical tradition, however much the interpretation of these sources may differ among Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed Jews.

If a Christian speaks to a Jew only on the basis of the latter's Old Testament heritage, he speaks past his partner and assumes faith conceptions that are no longer alive in either rabbinical or modern Judaism, at least not exclusively so. Typical of such concepts are anthropomorphic ideas about God as found in the Old Testament and the Talmud, the doctrine of bodily resurrection, the belief in the apparition of angels or, to speak of another realm, the law of talion.

How confused a Christian partner in theological dialogue can be, when confronted with the reality of today's Judaism, was demonstrated by a recent correspondence between F. G. Friedmann and Karl Rahner. There Rahner asks: "May the Christian so much as desire not recognize the claim of being especially chosen and having a particular

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claim on the world, and thus set aside his authentic being?" What, however, is this authentic being? Should the Jew allow his Christian partner, who expects him to "bear witness to Christ by his opposition," to prescribe his authenticity? The Jew does not consider himself "the man in opposition," to apply a term of Emil Brunner to this specific situation.

Rahner continues: "Must we as Christians not ask ourselves in fear, whether the Jews, by founding their state, will not be, rather, unfaithful to their own mission—if they thus, 'uninhibitedly,' want to become a nation among nations?" This question is legitimate, but only when asked by Jews who are searching for the essential purpose of their existence. Christians, however, prefer to see Israel as the "old Israel" precisely when it does not give up its ancient claim to be God's first-born and elect—the very claim that many Jews today can no longer uphold. Yet, dialogue will be meaningful only if, as Rahner himself says, we both learn "to recognize our own authentic being and that of the other." For the Christian, two factors determine today's conversation: It is a conversation born of guilt and of wonder.

On the basic emotion of guilt, Rahner remarks:

Each time I think of the Council's Declaration on the relationship of the Church and of Christians to Judaism, and then remember all the horrors perpetrated by Christians on Jews, I am overcome by a forlorn sadness. Forlorn sadness, because I ask myself why it was only now that the holy and simple matter-of-course statements of this Decree were pronounced definitively and officially; and why were they for fifteen centuries (if we broad-mindedly leave out the first three and the last two) of Christian history unable to transform the hearts of Christians. How terribly unchristian Christians could be, without even realizing it!

Here is an open acknowledgment that the Church has been very tardy in her declarations about a brotherly relationship toward Israel.

This confession of guilt is even more clearly stated in an article by Heinrich Spaemann which reads in part:

Our past thought and attitude vis-à-vis Israel hid a triple sin:

First, the doubt about God's fidelity toward the people which He singled out among all the peoples of the earth as His own in order to reveal Himself to mankind. In a sense, the covenants with the people, their fidelity, Jesus did not declare on account of the people refused to accept the prom- ise of God among them. Jesus knew that His mission was, He was the covenant. It was in Israel that it was the new. Such was God's in- Christ's love and whose taking part in the just fruits of salvation? The resurrection, the promise to Gentiles, Paul— all notwithstanding, we so that we fixed our eyes upon the bandit to the sins. Against the Epistle words: "Has God rejected the chief of Abraham's people? Has God rejected him for the dead? (Romans 11:11). And, too, that we nailed our dead to the cross, and the grace?

Our second sin was against Jesus. "This is the day of Elijah," We did the exact opposite of what is evil in man, in the wrongs of this sinfulness. We nailed it not been their red
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... reveal Himself to it and entrust to it the transmission of this revelation to mankind. In a solemn manner, He united Himself with it through the covenants with Abraham and at Sinai. For the sake of this covenant fidelity, Jesus did not leave Palestine when the ruling powers of His people refused to accept Him and the chances of proclaiming the kingdom of God among His people and in His country became slim indeed. Jesus knew that He had been sent to Israel, God's partner in the Sinai covenant. It was in Israel that the saving well was to gush out; from Israel that it was to go forth. "Salvation is from the Jews" (Jn 4:22). Such was God's irrevocable decision. It is for this reason that Jesus, until His death, wooed Israel, the bride whom God loves with an eternal love and whose taking home into the fullness of the Covenant, the participation in the divine kinship, is the purpose of the Messiah's advent. Certainly, all who believe in the Messiah shall belong to the messianic bride. It is out of Israel that the faith will spread. And he who believes will enter into union with the bridal community of Israel. If first Jesus dies by her hand, since His destiny as Saviour was by God's will linked to her, He also dies first for her sake. Who, after all, were the first fruits of salvation? Mary, the apostles, the disciples, the witnesses of the resurrection, the primitive community at Pentecost, the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul—all of them Jews. The explicit testimony of the Bible notwithstanding, we called Israel the once chosen people. This means that we fixed our eye on her failure but not on her grace. We saw only the bandit to the left of the Lord, not the one on the right. Yet, both were Jews. Against the phrase "once chosen," Paul wrote an entire chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. It is the eleventh and begins with the words: "Has God rejected His people? Never! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. No! God has not rejected the people He acknowledged as His own long ago" (11:1f). And, toward the end of the chapter, he says: "God does not take back His gracious gift or revoke His call" (11:29).

Our second sin against Israel was to identify her with the crucifixion of Jesus. "This is the people who crucified Jesus," we cried out. When did we say: "This is the people who gave to Jesus His living body?" We did the exact opposite of what God did and does. God wipes out what is evil in men and retains what is good. We have kept in mind the wrongs of this people and obliterated from our memory its righteousness. We nailed it to its guilt as if Jesus' being nailed to the cross had not been their redemption as well as ours. . . . And as if someone who
had been redeemed himself by the piercing of Jesus could even for a moment continue to nail another to that other’s guilt. All he does is to pierce Jesus Himself.

Our third sin was presumption. We behaved as if we had no part in Jesus’ crucifixion. As if in your life and mine nothing like that had ever happened, as if something like the Crucifixion could never happen to our people, in our land. In what dreadful forms has it taken place among us and through us?2

Spaemann summarizes here what is, expressed or unexpressed, the basic sentiment of many Christians. He has this to say about it:

A few decades ago, Jews existed only as individuals, at best as Jewry. They played an extremely small role in our Christian thinking, an even lesser one in our intercession. The liturgy had a single prayer for them, the perfidi Judaei, as they were called. Attached to it was a special directive not to kneel.

(For centuries, the prayer for the Jews has been part of the Good Friday intercessions. Its directive was struck out by order of Pope John XXIII, and the genuflection restored to the prayer.) Spaemann continues:

And now, for more than fifteen years, the people with whom the history of mankind’s salvation began is again a people in the land of their fathers. . . . Now we face again a concrete Israel, the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the land of its fathers. And with this, our own Christian existence gains a new aspect. Or rather: the biblical aspect of the Church again dawns before us, challenging us as on the first day.3

Here, then, we have the two aspects: guilt and wonder.

THE NECESSITY OF DIALOGUE

How should, how could the Jew enter this dialogue? In the spring of 1966, we witnessed a classical instance of how Jews should not enter it. At the Helsinki dialogue took place. The Christian partner Societies for Christian and is the representative of the venerable figure, and is the representative of the venerable figure, and is the representative of the venerable figure, and is the representative of the venerable figure, and is the representative of the venerable figure, and is the representative of the venerable figure, and is the representative of the venerable figure, and is the representative of the venerable figure. Nonetheless, spoke a point of “delegations that, without the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of the land of

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At the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a Jewish-Christian dialogue took place, with Evangelical and Catholic theologians as the Christian partners; they had come to Israel as members of the Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Germany. On the Jewish side, the meeting had been organized by the Israeli Interfaith Committee. The chairman, Dr. R. Zvi Werblowsky, Professor of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University, proceeded from the basic assumption that, whereas conversation may be a necessity for Christians, it was not one for Jews. (This conviction is widespread among Jews and not the particular view of Dr. Werblowsky.) Christianity claims to be the fulfillment of Judaism. The Gospel is addressed, as Paul says, first of all to the Jews, then to the Greeks who here stand vicariously for all heathens. The New Testament proclaims the Messiah of Israel; He is, at the same time, the Saviour of the world. Christians consider themselves the people of God's new election. All these tenets turn Christians again and again, indeed inescapably, toward the dialogue with the Jews. Judaism, however, has really nothing to discuss with Christianity. It rests completely in itself. Of course, a Jew should answer when questioned, but from a theological point of view he has no reason to initiate dialogue with Christians.

Such was the first negative assumption of the Jerusalem dialogue. The second was a sort of shock treatment. Werblowsky and his colleagues wanted to impress the reality of Israel on their Christian guests by demonstrating the unauthenticity of some prominent Jewish champions of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The principal target was the venerable figure of Martin Buber. To many Christians, Buber was and is the representative par excellence of Judaism in our time; he was and is the man who definitely stood by his Jewish position and, nonetheless, spoke a common language. The Jerusalem dialogue made a point of "demythologizing" Buber, that is, of telling the Christian partners that, within Judaism, Buber was more or less irrelevant, that he had taken a position that could not be considered representative of either the land of Israel or world Jewry.

At first, the Christian participants could do nothing but acknowledge these statements. Consequently, the dialogue went on without the indispensable depth; it drifted into a mere exchange of information and caused profound disappointment. Anyone who wished to disillu-
sion Christians eager to engage in dialogue could achieve his goal in this way. But who would profit? In no way does this procedure—I am deeply convinced—serve Christians, or for that matter Jews, nor does it further truth. To be sure, we may ask Pilate’s skeptical question: “What is truth?” Truth, in this context, is the decided profession of the salvific gift that was revealed to us, Jews and Christians. It is the ground of existence out of which we live and to which we must bear witness, one to the other, and both to the world.

Dialogue can be carried on meaningfully and fraternity only if it is a necessity to both partners. The Jew is challenged by the presence of the Church to search for the core of his being. Unless he barricades himself behind intellectual and spiritual ghetto walls, he must take note of the reality of the Church and take a position regarding her. He is questioned, even if the Church does not ask him any questions; her very existence is a question posed to Israel, just as Israel’s continued existence is a question and not a challenge to the Church.

To this vis-à-vis of Judaism and the Church, a concomitant to their existence, a new factor has been added that can be mastered only by dialogue: Judaism and Christianity confront a world of unbelief and they should, by their brotherly dialogue, give witness to the Kingdom of God. For both, Jews and Christians, this Kingdom is a kingdom-to-come. But seminally, it exists “in our midst” whenever Jews and Christians profess their faith before a world that has lost its faith.

Nothing is achieved when the legitimacy of Martin Buber as a spokesman for Judaism is contested. On the one hand, everyone knows that he was not representative of Jewish Orthodoxy; on the other, the number of those Christians who truly strive for a non-missionary Jewish-Christian dialogue is still relatively small. A figure such as that of Bishop Carli of Segni, who before and after the Council proclaimed, at the top of his voice, the stubbornness and infamy of the Jews, is not to be taken lightly. Even though Bishop Carli remained in a hopeless minority at the Council, he nevertheless represents millions of Catholics who have not learned to think anew. What matters is to bring people of good will and better insight to the point of conversing with one another, not to discourage those who are ready for dialogue by “shock treatments.”

Dialogue requires, therefore, a great deal of patience on both sides. Patience, however, is a Christian as well as a Jewish virtue; it is a human virtue—according to 15:4).

From impatient Christian dialogue of this kind the field and are destined to can only respond with: you go one mile, go with us.

Let us walk together, can. Yet I, for one, do not when it may no longer prayer is still feasible.

Here, too, I speak from in the Israel of Gwatt on Lake Thun, Spaincluded the Conference with Catholics, and Jews we evening, the beginning of service with Psalm 92, and

It is good to praise the Lord All of us who took part in the Israeli service with Psalm 92, Hebrew and in all the languages of the Conference. As a common prayer: The Lord our God, the presence of the Spirit enabled us to live by this expectation, which enables us to converse.
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decided profession of Christians. It is to which we must have only if it
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ence on both sides. Jewish virtue; it is a
human virtue—according to Paul, the prerequisite of hope (Rom 

From impatient Christians, I have often heard the argument that dialogues of this kind tend to become stuck in the theological fore-
field and are destined to flounder on the Christ question. To this, I can only respond with the admonition of Jesus: "If someone makes you go one mile, go with him two" (Mt 5:41).

Let us walk together, then, in the theological forefield as far as we can. Yet I, for one, do not believe that dialogue is the last word. Even when it may no longer be possible to continue the dialogue, common prayer is still feasible.

Here, too, I speak from experience. During the summer of 1966, I took part in the Israel Conference of "The Christian Peace Service" in Gwatt on Lake Thun, Switzerland. After a week of dialogue, we concluded the Conference with an ecumenical service at which Protestants, Catholics, and Jews worshipped together. It happened to be a Friday evening, the beginning of the Sabbath. For this reason, we began the service with Psalm 92, "A Song for the Sabbath Day":

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\text{It is good to celebrate the Lord in song} \\
\text{to praise your name, Most High,} \\
\text{To declare your grace in the morning,} \\
\text{your faithfulness by night.} \\
\text{(Ps 92[91]:2-3)}
\]

We ended the devotional hour with the priestly blessing of Aaron: "May the Lord bless you and keep you" (Num 6:24), in the original Hebrew and in all the languages of the participants, in German, English, French, Dutch, Italian, and in the Negro language of Cameroon. As a common profession of faith, we recited: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One!" (Dt 6:4).

All of us who took part in this service had a pentecostal feeling of the presence of the Spirit—the spirit of brotherhood which flows from the awareness that we all are God's sons and daughters. All this must not delude us into assuming that we are already in the Kingdom of God, which is the end of all "religions." But as men who wait, and live by this expectation, we are drawn closer together. This closeness enables us to converse in "the interim," in the time between revela-
tion and redemption, in the eon of extreme endangerment (Betrohung) to things human and divine which we live in and which is at the same time the eon of the dawn of the Kingdom of God, and it is toward this Kingdom that our being stretches.

From this perspective, we may gain new optimism, new hope, to which Teilhard de Chardin gave eloquent expression:

Jerusalem, lift up your head. Look at the immense crowds of those who build and those who seek. All over the world, men are toiling—in laboratories, in studios, in deserts, in factories, in the vast social crucible. The ferment they are bringing to art, science, and thought is all for you.

This means taking the world into a Greater Jerusalem which can no longer be fixed geographically, which we must build up together as a city set on a mountain, the City of God—and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.

THE PRESENT HOUR

WHAT is the hour like in which we hold our dialogue? What is the hour like in which we try to build the City of God? This is the historic hour when all that men have built is threatened with utter destruction by human hands. We all know this, yet we forget it again and again, each day. But we should be acutely aware that it is this threat which serves as the dark foil to all our endeavors.

We hold this dialogue also at a time when the "death of God" is much discussed. What is the meaning of all this talk? Toward the end of the last century, Friedrich Nietzsche uttered the terrible words: "God is dead." He called this death the "greatest event in recent history." Nietzsche had taken up an idea already expressed by Hegel with the words: "God has become relevant to things human and divine which we live in and which is at the same time the eon of the dawn of the Kingdom of God, and it is toward this Kingdom that our being stretches."

Heidegger interpreted our time transposed the idea of "immanence of subjectivity" to "immanence of subjectivity in technology and deliberation does not always prevail against it.

It has taken decades for the concept of a "theology after the death of God" to be born in the tomb. According to traditional sinner's representative belief, Jesus now represents a "hand in hand with a re-". According to tradition, Sölle says: "Christ takes the place of the sinner's representative before God; now represents God."

What Buber said is that "such speech is not as a pression about the eclipse of the fact that God is not eon."

What Buber said is that "such speech is not as a pression about the eclipse of the fact that God is not eon."

8. See ibid.; for also Martin P. 31 n.
9. See Nietzsche, loc. cit., p. 32.
10. See Buber, op. cit., p. 32.
Me endangerment (Be we live in and which is Kingdom of God, and it es. optimism, new hope, to pression: nsse crowds of those who en are toiling—in laborata vast social crucible. The sought is all for you. 5

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with the words: "God himself is dead." 7 Hegel himself referred to Pascal who spoke, however, of the "lost God." 8 To the declaration of the death of God, Nietzsche added the acknowledgment of guilt: "We killed Him." 9

Heidegger interpreted Nietzsche's words to mean that the man of our time transposed the idea of God from objective existence into the "immanence of subjectivity." According to Heidegger, the death of God has become relevant to modern man by the conscious or unconscious renunciation of metaphysics. 10 Our world, which is one of technology and deliberate rationalization—even though the rationalization does not always succeed—no longer seems to have room for God.

It has taken decades for theology to take up Nietzsche's cry; it has taken decades for the present, almost desperate, attempt to develop a "theology after the death of God." In this context, Paul Tillich is often quoted as an authority because he once said that Christianity was born in the tomb. 11 The death of the Son of God becomes here the point of departure for a "death of God" theology, a process that goes hand in hand with a re-interpretation of the concept of "representation." According to traditional Christian teaching, Jesus Christ is the sinner's representative before God. To the "death of God" theologians, Jesus now represents among men the God who is "absent." Dorothee Sölle says: "Christ takes the place of the absent God as long as He does not let Himself be seen by us." 12 As if in apology, she adds: "Such speech is not as absurd as it seems. It resembles Buber's expression about the eclipse of God; it accepts the challenge inherent in the fact that God is not present, is not directly experienced in our eon."

What Buber said is this: "Eclipse of the light of heaven, eclipse of

10. See Buber, op. cit., p. 32.
God—such indeed is the character of the historic hour through which the world is passing.” 

It is no accident that advocates of a “Christian theology after the death of God” should look around for Jewish support and so come upon Buber’s *Eclipse of God*. Indeed, “death of God” and “eclipse of God” are similar in meaning, both mean that God is not “ready at hand” to men of our time, that they can no longer address Him in prayer because no living word of God is addressed to them. The dialogic relationship is disturbed.

Now, as we see, to a certain “modern Christian theology,” Jesus Christ presents himself as a deputy of the absent or dead God. Such representation is inconceivable to Judaism. Rather, does the “real presence” of Israel take the place of the *deus absconditus*, the hidden God. The flesh and blood People of the Covenant is accepted as a deputy of the God of the Covenant. (Most Jews are not conscious of the process, though present Jewish reality bears the stamp of such representation. Only thus does the remark by Nahum Goldmann, President of the World Jewish Congress, that Christian-Jewish dialogue is possible only on the political, cultural, and humane, not on the religious and theological, planes become understandable. 

I present this view as typical, although I myself am of the completely opposite opinion.)

Christian-Jewish dialogue, as an existential conversation, must be carried on in the imperfect reality of this existence: “Here the inadequate becomes event” (*Il Faust*, act V, scene vii). The present state of the dialogue does not permit us to pass over in silence the frequently raised question: “Who is a Jew?” Yet, the other question must be asked too: “Who is a Christian?” Ideal-typical abstractions of what a Jew or Christian is, correct definitions of religious law and dogma will not do, for the dialogue cannot take place between ideas, but only between living persons. According to Halakah, the rabbinical law, a person is a Jew if born of a Jewish mother, though what constitutes a “Jewish mother” remains undefined. A Christian is one who has received the sacrament of baptism. What does this mean? Innumerable men born of a Jewish mother do not bear witness by their lives for Israel, while millions of our contemporaries were baptized without ever attempting to become followers of Christ. At

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14. See *Davar* (Tel Aviv), September 14, 1966.
our dialogue, therefore, these masses are \textit{a priori} "bracketed out," as it were.

Among our contemporaries there are also those who live as if nothing in our world had changed. They, too, are to be "bracketed out" for the dialogue. Living within closed systems as they do, they will not find a common language. They remain imprisoned within the "four ells of the Halakah," on the one hand, or behind real or spiritual convent walls, on the other. Only Jews and Christians who, while experiencing the crises of our era, hear the unmistakable voice of eternity through the voices of our times can speak to each other in a language that will be heard and understood today. Among these men who can be truly contemporaries (\textit{Zeitgenossen}) to one another, there may be many who can perceive of eternity only in the act of representation, either by the figure of Jesus Christ or by the real presence of Israel.

I should like to prevent a misunderstanding that my readers may easily fall into. To speak of the "real presence" of Israel is not to divinize the people. Israel is seen here as mystery, as \textit{mysterium tremendum}, as "awesome mystery." No doubt, the logical conclusion of this thought points to God as the Lord of this mystery. Yet, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that there are Jews today who have experienced the mystery of Israel as the center of their lives without bearing the name of God on their lips. These Jews are not—and this seems to be decisive—a marginal group, but personalities who, in the epoch of its rebirth, are at the core of the Jewish people. As a prototype, I mention David Ben-Gurion.

This transformation of Israel must be brought into our colloquies if the dialogue is to have existential meaning. Christian-Jewish dialogue is not to be separated from our lives or relegated to the fringe of our existence. Whenever this dialogue becomes reality, it transfigures the few people who live it. They themselves become dialogue. It is in this sense that Martin Buber interpreted the verse of Hoelderlin:

\[
\textit{Ever since we have been a dialogue} \\
\textit{And able to bear, each the other.}
\]
Schalom Ben-Chorin

Buber comments:

Hoelderlin does not say "ever since we have been in dialogue;" he says and means: "ever since we have been a dialogue." Our "being spoken" is our existence. By this very fact it is a "divine gift," indeed it is the real gift. . . . In the measure that each of us reveals himself to the other, fulfilling the word that each is, we allow what-is-to-come to come. In the end, the ability to hear that characterizes existence in reciprocity will lead to the point where all will experience one another . . . and the pure voices will resound together.¹⁶

According to Buber's interpretation of Hoelderlin, everything depends on our becoming dialogue in which we can hear one another and in which, eventually, both voices will sound together. What does this consonance of our voices mean except the great "Hallelujah" that completes the Psalter: "All breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah" (Ps 150:6).

This praise of the Lord resounds even where His name is not, or has not yet been, pronounced. Dare we say that as we, prostrate creatures, strive for conversation, this praise rings with heavenly purity in the song of the angels which thus becomes the chastened echo of our earthly stammer?

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¹⁶. Martin Buber, Nachlese (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1965), pp. 7ff.

Editor's Note: If I may voice an opinion on two quotations used by the author on page 55, I must say that James Parkes' observation does not agree with the official attitude of the American bishops (see their "Guidelines" on pages 257-262 of this volume). Again, is it not more in keeping with the entire prophetic message to understand Micah's saying not as: Let the nations take the roads they want, but as: No matter which roads the nations take, we will walk the way of the living God?

THE DIALECTIC

WRITING some time ago, Markus Barth discussed the problem of Islam's relations with Christianity. He made to Christianity in a certain sense, that is, he looked finding an important part of the divine scheme of salvation with Maimonides, are the pone brought the words of Maimonides (Maimonides adds, of course, that, when the true Messiah comes, Christianity and Islam will merge into the one world of the truth.) For a medieval Jew, this decision marked a significant break. Barth notes, "a contemporary of sin of their attendant slaughter - his task would have been impossible."

But an element of controversy. While the Chris

1. Markus Barth, "What is a Jew?" in Journal of Ecumenicaal Theology. The Maimonides passage is in the Orthodox edition (Orthodoxed) and somewhat impor

Jakob J. Petuchowicz