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# SOME JEWISH VIEWS OF PAUL

(as basis of a consideration of Jewish-Christian relations)

By HALVOR RONNING, Jerusalem

## *Introduction*

There has been a change in the relation of Christians and Jews<sup>1</sup>. The French Revolution focused forces of emancipation. Though, of course, Jews certainly had their opinions about Christianity, it was only following this upheaval that they gained increasing freedom of expression<sup>2</sup>. Whereas the old orthodox Judaism took a negative position, largely maintained in modern orthodoxy as well, liberal Judaism is rather characterized by a genuine interest in early Christian literature — at least as documents of possible historical significance for Judaism<sup>3</sup>.

When a Jew began to be considered not first a Jew but a man, the door to the larger cultural world was opened. However, it was a "Christian European Culture". Still many Jews did not enter by simple adoption and assimilation, but rather attacked. Hugo Bergmann of Jerusalem characterizes two approaches of this offensive:

1. A positive evaluation of the teaching of Jesus, but a negative evaluation of succeeding developments.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Neumann, "Jesus and Paulus . . .". *Saat auf Hoffnung*, vol. 60 (1923), p. 34—36. G. Lindeskog, *Die Jesusfrage* (Uppsala, 1938), p. 111, 321.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to Europe. Free and heavy debate did take place in the Persian Empire of the early centuries A. D., and sometimes in Moslem countries. G. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism", *HTR* ( ), p. 199 to 200. Christian control of Europe left little freedom of expression and at times led to heavy persecutions.

<sup>3</sup> Moore, *ibid.*

2. A certain devaluation of Christianity as a “daughter religion”<sup>4</sup>. He expresses sorrow that one can often feel “political motivations” behind these interpretations, i. e., efforts to gain more privileges and improved status, rather than genuine religious concerns<sup>5</sup>.

Not all presentations have been attacks; certainly some have been highly positive. The first attempt by a Jew to present an objective scientific critique of Christianity was the book *Yeshua Ha Notzri ve Torahav* (1838) by Josef Salvador<sup>6</sup>. As regards positive evaluation of Christianity, Max Friedlander went so far as to be quite untypical of other Jews; he indeed heartily praised Paul for saving Christianity from the legalism of James<sup>7</sup>.

On the other side, some Christians have bent over backwards too. Moore not only enters into a skepticism against Paul, but attacks his overstrained definition of the law and even his supposed denial of the prophetic doctrine of repentance<sup>8</sup>.

More common than these bridge-builders, who have gone so far as to depreciate considerably their own traditions, are the wedge drivers. The method of using distinctions as wedges to split off or hold away unwanted claims is a time tested method. Atheists often drive wedges between empirically verifiable statements and unreliable emotive expressions in order to dismiss as the latter any claims upon them which may be made in the name of a meta-

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<sup>4</sup> H. Bergmann, “The Problem of Christianity . . .”, *Prosdor*, vol. 9—10 (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 56.

In the former case, he mentions the variance in interpretations: S. Hirsch feels that already Paul is not Jewish. But Geiger feels that much of the later development was also Jewish. Ben Amuzak even claimed John’s “the word became flesh” as Jewish — and refers to certain Jewish cabbalistic notions as also containing similar assertions.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60. Within the context of the changed situation which provided increasing freedom of expression, these political motivations have been dominant, he feels. Yet now in the aftermath of Nazism, it is the Christians who are stirred by deep questions and seek the conversation. Also the advent of the State of Israel stirs thought toward explanations. Perhaps a new, and most difficult, approach is beginning — the discussion of genuinely religious concerns. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Lindeskog, p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> G. Moore, *Judaism*, vol. III (Cambridge, 1927), p. 311.

physical reality. We Protestants drive a wedge between the authority of Scripture and of tradition, in order to discard Roman Catholic claims on our allegiance. Likewise, Jews who have not simply rejected Christian claims by ignoring them, have needed wedges. Such wedges as the distinctions between original genuine traditions and later corruptions, and between mother religion and daughter religion have been mentioned.

*Aim.* The aim of this paper is: I. To give a brief description of some aspects of these wedges — especially in regard to interpretation of Paul. II. To critically analyze some specific issues in the interpretation of Paul — especially in Buber's interpretation, and III. To propose a basis of understanding for future relations between Jews and Christians.

### *I. Wedges*

Thesis: Numerous Jews sensitive to the claims of Christian faith have overcome these claims by resorting to interpretations: A. which demonstrate that the "actual *origins*" of Christianity are extraneous to Jesus and his people or B. which imply that "actual *goal*" of Christianity is irrelevant, viz., the universality of Christianity is not for all mankind as Christians wrongly suppose, but only for the Gentiles.

A. The origin of Christianity is to be found not in Jesus' teaching, but only in later developments. Therefore true loyalty to the way of Jesus, who was a Jewish believer, does not require entrance into the Christian church, but rather perseverance in Judaism.

Paul is often selected as the outstanding figure instigating the above shift away from Jesus and Judaism.

1. Paul has a gloomy view of man. He had gloomy views about the power of the evil inclination and the impossibility of overcoming it<sup>9</sup>. It is his doctrine of the depth of sin which is un-Jewish and is the presupposition for his notions redemption and reconciliation<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> C. Montefiore, "Rabbinic Judaism . . .", *JQR*, vol. 13 (1901), p. 127. M. Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (New York, 1961), p. 162—169.

<sup>10</sup> Lindeskog, p. 310, 314.

2. Paul taught the superfluity of the law<sup>11</sup>. With his notions of the sinfulness of man, perfect obedience to the law became impossible, and so there is need for redemption. Moreover the law must have been temporary since the patriarchs did without it, i. e., the law came to fulfill the temporary task of revealing the need for salvation — such as is brought through Jesus<sup>12</sup>.

Montefiore declares this conception to be “unreal”, and inexplicable by Judaism. Paul’s criticism of Law falls “like water on a duck’s back”<sup>13</sup>. Moreover the Rabbinic Jew never took the exaggerated view “that the whole Law (with all its enactments) has to be obeyed”; he took a more practical view<sup>14</sup>.

Baeck, on the other hand, refuses any notion that Paul discarded or judged the Law. He looked upon it as holy and good (Rom. 7: 12). “We uphold the Law” (Rom. 3: 31). What happened is not that Paul developed an un-Jewish conception of law. He simply followed the Jewish doctrine of epochs according to which chaos, Torah, messianic kingdom, and eternal life followed upon one another. This was a Jewish question. What distinguished Paul from the Jewish people was rather a question of fact — whether or not the Messiah had really finally revealed himself<sup>15</sup>, i. e., whether the period of Torah had come to an end.

3. Paul “was the one who invested Jesus with divinity”<sup>16</sup>. It was in Pauline Christianity that Jesus first became a saviour in a supernatural sense. This doctrine of Christ as God’s son and mediator is central to Pauline theology<sup>17</sup>. Paulinism consists of an exaggerated notion of man’s depth of sin and accordingly has an exaggerated notion of the means necessary for overcoming it, viz., the mediatorship of Christ<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> H. Graetz, *Popular History of the Jews*, vol. II (New York, 1937), p. 268. Al Qirqisani, in article on him by L. Nemoy, *HUCA*, VII, p. 365.

<sup>12</sup> C. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul* (London, 1914), p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> Montefiore, *JQR* (1901), p. 167—168.

<sup>14</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul*, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> L. Baeck, *Paulus, die Pharisäer und das Neue Testament* (Frankfurt am Main, 1961), p. 24—27.

<sup>16</sup> Al Qirqisani, *ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>17</sup> Lindeskog, *ibid.*, p. 310—312.

<sup>18</sup> Buber, *ibid.*, p. 154, 162—170. “Demonocracy and mediatorship.”

Rosenzweig speaks of a traditional Jewish instinctive feeling that “the Christian’s relationship to God, and hence to his religion, is a meager and roundabout affair”<sup>19</sup>. (But Flusser can speak of “truly original unprecedented Christian religious experience” as creative of the Christology of the new faith<sup>20</sup>.) So then, generally, “as for the religion of the Christians which they profess today, it was Paul who introduced and established it”<sup>21</sup>.

Yet it becomes evident that Jewish evaluation of Paul’s background and the origins of his notions is varied. Certain variations in the interpretation of Paul have already been mentioned above in passing, but now the specific issue of the relation of Jewish and Hellenistic influences will be briefly considered.

E. Strauss declares that he doesn’t know the man. «Er hört auf, Jude zu sein als aus dem Saulus ein Paulus wurde<sup>22</sup>.»

The Christian scholar Schweitzer had stated that “Paulinism and Hellenism” have in common their religious terminology, but, in respect of ideas, nothing. The apostle did not Hellenize Christianity<sup>23</sup>. Rather the source of his conceptions on redemption and sacrament derive from the eschatological element of Jewish apocalyptic<sup>24</sup>. But Jacob opposed and claimed that Hellenism and the opposition of the Jews were responsible for Paul’s view of sacraments and law, respectively, and for his mission to the Gentiles<sup>25</sup>.

This last point however is precisely what Baeck takes as an indication of Paul’s Jewishness, viz., consciousness that a revelation

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<sup>19</sup> F. Rosenzweig in N. Glatzer’s *Franz Rosenzweig* (New York, 1953), p. 346.

<sup>20</sup> D. Flusser, *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, vol. IV (1958), p. 265.

<sup>21</sup> Al Qirqisani, *ibid.*, p. 365; K. Kohler, *The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church* (New York, 1929), p. 260; Lindeskog, *ibid.*, p. 310 (with references to six more writers in support of this point); E. Jacob, *Monatsschrift . . .*, vol. 75 (1931), p. 328; Buber, *ibid.*, p. 154; Neumann, *ibid.*, p. 44; Graetz, *ibid.*, p. 266; M. Freimann, *Monatsschrift . . .*, vol. 55 (1911), p. 172.

<sup>22</sup> Strauß in Neumann, *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> A. Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters* (London, 1912), p. 238.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob, *ibid.*, p. 331.

involves a commission, an immediate readiness to live accordingly as witness to its truth. Paul knew Christ as Messiah, and so «Der letzte Jude in der jungen Kirche war ihr letzter Apostel. Mit der griechischen Erbfolge begann ein neues Kapitel in der Geschichte der Kirche»<sup>26</sup>. In any case, Paul himself «war nicht Hellenist»<sup>27</sup>.

Whether Paul may be well nigh incomprehensible as a Jew, at least in certain points<sup>28</sup>, or whether he can be understood completely within Jewish categories<sup>29</sup>, one can agree that «der Geist des Paulus umfaßte viele Dinge . . . Er war sich der Vollständigkeit seiner Vision bewußt, aber auch der Unvollkommenheit seiner Fähigkeit, sie in Worte zu fassen. Denn unser Urteilen ist Stückwerk und unser Weissagen ist Stückwerk» (1. Kor. 13.9)<sup>30</sup>.

B. Christianity is a daughter religion whose claims may well apply to all Gentiles, but not to the Jews from whom it developed as an offshoot. Therefore loyalty to God in no way requires either the giving up of insistence on the importance of Jewish observances nor the acceptance of new Christian notions or rituals.

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<sup>26</sup> Baeck, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19. It seems that the question of degrees of Jewish or Hellenistic influence will remain a perennial issue not only in the case of Paul, but in the case of all Palestinian documents of this period. Perhaps what is significant to the reader in such discussions is not so much the conclusions drawn by the various scholars about specific documents, but rather their overall insight, their estimation and evaluation of the nature of the influences themselves: What was Hellenism, and what was Judaism of that time? If there were agreement about this, the question of proportion of influence in a certain document would be vastly clearer.

<sup>28</sup> Kohler, *ibid.*, 265?; Moore, *ibid.*, p. 151, 495; S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1961), p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> Baeck, *ibid.*, p. 30; Schweitzer, *ibid.*, p. 241; Friedlander in Lindeskog, *ibid.*, p. 311 — «gesetzesfreie hellenistische Jude».

<sup>30</sup> Baeck, *ibid.*, p. 17. Likewise Dr. Flusser's view that there is no consistent overall system to Paul's thought, but that within it are elements of various systems — likewise such a recognition of manifold character helps us to understand how there can be such varying interpretations of Paul when one aspect is emphasized to the neglect of others. One's prejudices, particularly the extent of one's belief in the possibility of a rationalistic system of human existence, will determine whether one sees self contradictory confusion or overall harmony in a multiplicity of details.

So Kohler can fear Paul's distinction of "believers and unbelievers" as a worse division of mankind than "Jews and Gentiles"<sup>31</sup> and yet hail him as "indeed an instrument in the hands of Divine Providence to win the heathen nations for Israel's God of righteousness"<sup>32</sup>.

Paul wrote of having received insight into the mystery of Christ, viz., that the Gentiles are fellow heirs (Eph. 3: 4-6), and Rosenzweig agreed even more whole-heartedly than Kohler. "We are wholly agreed as to what Christ and his church mean to the world: no one can reach the Father save through him. No one can reach the Father! But the situation is quite different for one who does not have to reach the Father, because he is already with him. And this is true of the people of Israel (though not of individual Jews)<sup>33</sup>." If Schoeps be right in evaluating these letters of Rosenzweig as the purest form of Jewish-Christian dialogue yet attained at that time (1910s)<sup>34</sup>, then it is all the more significant that precisely here we see the line of distinction clearly drawn. Christianity may apply to every one else, but not to the Jews<sup>35</sup>.

## II. Analysis<sup>36</sup>

This analysis of some specific issues in Jewish interpretations of Paul is conducted by a Christian student. As such I am deliberately

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<sup>31</sup> Kohler, *ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>33</sup> Rosenzweig, *ibid.*, p. 341.

<sup>34</sup> H. Schoeps, *Jüdisch-christliches Religionsgespräch ...* (Berlin, 1937), p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> Certainly Rosenzweig's remarkable straightforwardness is to be highly commended. He speaks openly of the "pride of the Jew" as the "Jewish expression of the concept of Christianity as the 'forerunner' ..." (Rosenzweig, p. 346).

He also speaks plainly of Hermann Cohen's longing for the dawn of the messianic era as "the conversion of Christians to the pure monotheism" of his Judaism, a conversion which Cohen thought the liberal Protestant theology of his day was initiating (Rosenzweig, p. 351).

<sup>36</sup> A tiny but highly significant hint of the development which is taking place in Jewish scholarship may be seen in the example of Montefiore's attitude toward Jewish sources of Paul's day. In 1901 he wrote, "If the (Jewish) religion was 'nomistic' in 50, it was assuredly no less nomistic in



trying to be conscious of how my Christian presuppositions are influencing my analysis. "Without sufficient clarification of that which has to be clarified, men will continue to speak to each other at cross purposes<sup>37</sup>." In the following critical approach, I hope to show how a Christian can come to different conclusions than a Jew while looking at the same materials, i. e., I hope that in the examples of my critique, my motives will be so transparent that in the final section of this paper I can clearly summarize the nature of the tension in our relationships, and how to face it.

A. Critique of some issues in Buber's book, *Two Types of Faith*.

1. Buber's concept of Judaism and Christianity as two types of faith should be opposed by the concept of two stages in one faith. The former distinction of Jewish faith as "trusting *someone*", and Christian faith as "acknowledging *something* to be true" looks suspect to me as a Christian<sup>38</sup>. Even though it be intended in all sincerity to be a fair description of the situation, it looks quite close to Buber's concepts of I-Thou and I-It relationships<sup>39</sup> — which seems to leave Christianity with a faith relationship somewhat less than the fully human I-Thou relation<sup>40</sup>.

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500. The formative period was already over in the age of St. Paul" (*JQR* [1901], p. 164). But in 1914 he definitely mentions the difficulty of making such an assumption (*Judaism and St. Paul*, p. 14—15).

<sup>37</sup> Buber, *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7—11.

<sup>39</sup> S. Hooke, *CQR* (1952/53), p. 360—361.

<sup>40</sup> The act of *acknowledging* some statement to be true (whether its truth has been established by the tests of correspondence with fact, by inner coherence, or by workability) is not like *being* in the truth. Only the latter, it seems to me, refers to a relationship which could be called faith. The reason is that only when the totality of a human life is involved (and not only an intellectual judgment nor even a specific act) only then have all selfish personal controls of the relationship been abandoned for the sake of what could be called genuine faith, i. e., a complete trust. Something less does not deserve to be called a faith, not even as a lesser type.

However, if the statement which is to be acknowledged actually concerns a matter of *absolute* loyalty, then one is already in the realm of faith and there really is *no* distinction.

At most, Buber's distinction seems to indicate a difference in emphasis historically, viz., since the early days of the initial decisions of Hebrew family groups to join in worship of Yahweh, being Jewish has been more

Though Buber's actual treatment seems often enough to relegate Christian "pistis" to a position inferior to Jewish "emunah", yet the integrity of his *desire* for fairness is not to be doubted. This is most strongly attested in his closing words about a future when both will have help to offer to *one another*<sup>41</sup>.

It seems to me that the Christian doctrine of a *New Covenant* requires the notion that there is but one same faith, though it was variously present in different *preparatory old* stages. A Christian cannot admit to the equality of a Jewish concept of faith any more than a Jew can admit to the superiority of the Christian concept, and the latter will usually also incline (if only out of reaction to similar Christian behaviour towards him) to consider the Christian concept inferior. In other words, the issue here (to which I will later refer) seems to confront us with a necessary difference of approach by Christian and Jew.

2. This seems to me evident also in the case of a more common problem of discussion — the mediatorschip of Christ. Whereas Buber speaks of an immediacy of emunah, he indicates that the Pauline gloomy view of the demonocracy of this world requires the balance of a mediatorship<sup>42</sup>.

To call this latter picture the correlative of *Pauline* division of justice and grace — just punishment now and mediated grace later, seems to betray the traditional Jewish suspicion that the notion of mediator involves a meager roundabout conception of religion<sup>43</sup>.

For me the whole point of the "Trinity" doctrine is in the emphasis on the very richness and dynamism in God himself that Buber evidently thinks can be maintained only by an immediacy of faith without any mediating notions. I am rather inclined to see in strict and absolute monotheism a paucity. Such poverty of con-

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associated with an "*automatic*" membership by birth than is the case with Christians — or, since this can certainly be disputed in certain instances, at least this is true as over against the heavy *individualistic* emphases of much of modern Protestant thinking.

<sup>41</sup> Buber, *ibid.*, p. 174; Lindeskog, *ibid.*, p. 320 — comment on «Religion der Zukunft».

<sup>42</sup> Buber, *ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> Rosenzweig, *ibid.*, p. 346.

ception results when God is reduced to an intellectual principle of abstract pure unity <sup>44</sup>.

3. Buber emphasizes the individual character of Christianity which is entered by a “facing about”, whereas in Judaism the task is one of “persisting in” a community into which one is born <sup>45</sup>. I do not find these matters to be distinguishing, but rather common to both groups — and do not feel that a difference in emphasis which can perhaps often be descriptively determined is therefore of essential importance. The matters of individual — community and “facing about” — “persisting in” are common problems.

What may have mislead Buber is the actual fact that much of recent Protestant Christianity has indeed been highly individualistic.

Also he may have made the chronological error of overlooking the fact that at the *beginning* of Israel’s relationship there was just as much a demand for the “facing about” of the “individual” as at the *beginning* of any Christian’s relationship, i. e., the “individual” (even if a *unit then* may have been a family or tribe) was faced with the *decision* of entering the covenant . . . though *later* such a decision would take the form of reaffirmation of membership rather than an entry, i. e., a “persisting in” rather than a “facing about”.

4a). My concern has been to get at underlying inclinations. The best example can now be given. Buber writes, “There is scarcely any need to say that every apologetic tendency is far from my purpose” <sup>46</sup>. Consider how he continues. In distinguishing his two “types” of faith, he speaks of the one as “Greek”, as a product of “Oriental decay”, “not genuine Jewish”, “opposed to Jesus” (p. 55—56), “Gnostic” in nature of its essential features (p. 83), in danger of gloominess (p. 169), and of rigidity (p. 173). Such indications of slant caused me to definitely feel the inferiority of this Christian “pistis” as compared to Jewish “emunah”. It seems quite obvious that Buber definitely did stray from his purpose of not being apologetic.

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<sup>44</sup> Again, here in the case of the mediacy — immediacy issue, I have sought to check for underlying inclinations or suspicions, which influence Jews and Christians to create opposing interpretations.

<sup>45</sup> Buber, *ibid.*, p. 172—173.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

b) Yet in his favor it may be said that he likely did *not* do so intentionally, at least not with malice of forethought. Indeed he did seem to push pistis into a radical individualism with its “exclusive abode in personal life” and elsewhere without effect<sup>47</sup> — after he had just finished stating that *faith* by its very nature *transcends* the world of the person<sup>48</sup>. But his concluding words strongly reaffirm his *intended* avoidance of apologetic. Christians and Jews have “something as yet unsaid to say to each other and a help to give one another — hardly to be conceived at the present time”<sup>49</sup>.

B. Critique of the suggestion that Paul only “used” the notion of the impossibility of the law in order to exalt Christ as the necessary Saviour and to make it easy to proselytize<sup>50</sup>.

Here a fundamental question arises. Did Paul have some gloomy pessimistic view of man who could not fulfill God’s law, and so he reached out for the notion of a mediating Saviour? Or did he reflect on the witness to Christ as the Messiah and find himself stupified by Christ’s death — and thereby was forced unwillingly to insight into the depth of man’s sinfulness before God? This latter seems to accord with the facts of Paul’s life.

Christ’s death at the hands of observants of the law can well be what forced Paul to define the law not in terms of immediate human possibility, but in terms of impossibility for the sinner. So the law as God’s holy will for man’s obedience was upheld at the expense of the “law” as immediately possible observances. When a man in repentance gives up the notion of any self-propelled fulfillment, then he gains the spirit of Christ, of loving, self-sacrificial submission, which is the fulfillment of the law in the deepest sense. However, now after this revelation through Christ’s death- and resurrection (which showed that the death was indeed a revelation and not just another human death), specific set *patterns of protective external observances* can no longer maintain their significance. Rather the *spirit* of wholehearted obedience, which was always their basis too, has been openly revealed as primary!

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>50</sup> Neumann, *ibid.*, p. 41; Moore, *ibid.*, p. 150—151 (Moore falls completely for Akiba’s faulty argument against the younger Gamaliel).

Surely this did make Gentile entrance to the faith community “easier” by abrogating from now on the superiority of observances particular to the Jewish people, but it does not abrogate the fact which remains that God chose the Jews through which to act, and it does not make the life of faith easier. As difficult as it may be to live according to elaborate mitzvot, it is more difficult to live in freedom of service without being able to rely on the certainty of the righteousness of one’s various decisions and actions; an inner righteousness of spirit is demanded, a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, a righteousness which can never be satisfied with holding to set patterns of action, but is on the search for new ways to express thanks and love to God. Certainly such a demanding level of life is beyond the breaking point of sinful human capabilities, but the Christian lives on precisely in such an atmosphere, confident that God loves him as he is and forgives him when repentant, and also secure and peaceful in the knowledge that when life is lived in the atmosphere of God’s love in Christ, then the yoke is easy and the burden is light — not because the burden of strain is light in itself, but because the love that carries it is so strong.

The above section has been a discussion of a selection of particular aspects of Jewish interpretations of Paul. In each instance a critique has been made and a different proposal offered from one Christian’s point of view. Has this simply been more wedge-driving? Yes, on a strictly intellectual plane in itself, this emphasis on differences has been wedge-driving, but hopefully it can be shown that at a deeper level even the above has been precisely intended in the spirit of bridge-building, which has as a primary requirement the *demand* that the evaluation of the strength of the materials to be used in the bridge be *honest*.

### *III. Basis for bridges*

#### A. A priori limits

1. *Necessary differences.* It seems to me unavoidable that Jews and Christians as such must necessarily and basically disagree,

and the focus of this disagreement will be precisely in the matter of what it is that distinguishes us from each other — there is even a wedge between the wedges we use.

*Even if* our differences could be reduced to the basic issue of whether or not the Messiah has already arrived, still a basic disagreement remains in our respective notions of *why* the other holds to the view he does. A Christian who believes in Christ as Saviour of the world will always suppose that it is hardness of heart that prevents the Jew — even if that hardness is assumed as being almost entirely *our* guilt — because of the way we have persecuted Jews and practically crushed any remaining openness to the New Testament message. A Jew who believes in the continually satisfactory character of his religion, at least for Jews, will always suppose that it is Gentile hatred and arrogance which refuses to leave him in peace but continually tries to assimilate or eliminate him.

Jews will always aim at mutual respect from the Gentiles by dimming the Christian claims to *complete* universality. Christians will always aim at absorption of others, including the Jews, by dimming all claims for full self-sufficiency outside the Christian faith.

2. *Function of the intellect.* Is this a counsel of despair? By no means! It is the necessary first step to secure honest evaluation of the strength of the materials to be used in the bridge. True, so far it seems that no materials strong enough exist, but this is only an illusion — the illusion of intellectualism, which by nature of his task remains a constant temptation to the student.

Of utter importance is the following check on our intellectual activity of attempting to understand one another. “My rationality, my rational power of thought is merely a part, a particular function of my nature; when however I ‘believe’ . . . my entire being is engaged, the totality of my nature enters into the process, indeed this becomes possible only because the relationship of faith is a relationship of my entire being<sup>51</sup>.”

Such proper regard for the role of the intellect is fundamental

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<sup>51</sup> Buber, *ibid.*, p. 8.

when intellectualizing about faith. My *intellectual notions* about the nature of my own faith are only hints and guidelines of a possible help to my *life* of faith — but they are certainly not necessarily helpful, and possibly the reverse. Surely then I ought all the more to have a humble skepticism about fully comprehending the status of someone else's faith.

3. *A possible discrepancy between concept and life.* On such a basis of proper intellectual humility it is possible to conceive that although I might be quite right in my Christian *concepts*, a Jewish believer — though outmoded to me — may actually *live* in a deeper dependence on God than I. But this is not something which I can judge. My intellectual business and his is to present the truth as we see it, i. e., as honestly as we know how. Even though on this level we may primarily be driving wedges, yet a common humility and honesty provide the first essential foundations for bridge building.

#### B. The present task

The task is to try in all *honesty* to change each other. This is because a Christian who accepts the Jewish claim to have a separate status without need of Christ is changed in his fundamental attitude toward the universality of God's work in Christ. This is because a Jew who fully accepts the Christian claim that now a Jew no longer has his same exclusive status is changed in his fundamental attitude.

It may seem that a *Jew* could be content to live side by side with a Christian since a Jew seeks a separate and isolated way. But since the *Christian* asserts the universality of God in Christ, the Jew is forced to respond with his claims of the right to be left alone, and so both are confronted with the need to assert their claims on each other anyway.

A bridge for the free flow and interchange of traffic is impossible on the level of faith; change of faith is not solely a matter of intellectual interchange, it is a matter of God's activity. But a bridge as a meeting place for the bartering of ideas is highly desirable. Even though the ultimate aim will be to convince the other to "come

across the bridge to my side” or, in the case of a Jew, at least to convince the other to “go home and quit coming out to bother me with your challenges” — nevertheless such confrontation is certainly necessary. The alternative of letting Christians go home and then express their aggressiveness (which is essential to Christian faith) by perversely rocketing war heads of hatefilled persecution into Jewish territory is impossible for a genuine Christian and scarcely to be desired by a Jew (who may, by conversation, even persuade faltering Christians to go home and give up their aggressiveness — though thereby the Christian gives up the fulness of his faith by giving up its essential missionary outreach).

Especially in the field of historical studies there is a common ground where we can help each other in gaining further insights into the composition of our literary sources. Here the presence of conflicting approaches can cause a greater wakefulness of insight. Yet as we gratefully help one another, honesty demands that we not hide our ultimate goals, or else we will no longer be in the genuine contact of believers but will reduce our faith to the level of a rationalistic jargon suitable only to deism.

As long as Rabbinic tradition remains primary to a Jew he will find his observances sufficient. As long as *New Testament* tradition remains primary to a Christian, he will witness to all men. So then, since we differ in this incompatible way, let us be *honest* about trying to change each other, and by God’s grace, do so in *love*.

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