

POSTSCRIPT AND PREFACE

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Taking leave from Jerusalem after having lived and worked here for nearly thirteen years I feel the need to express in words what the Jerusalem Rainbow Group has meant to us. In the midst of the tensions, contradictions and traumatic memories which are pervading the atmosphere of this city there was the Jerusalem Rainbow Group. Here were Jews and Christians trying to understand each other and refusing to be carried away by strife and isolation. Here there was freedom to express ourselves in the presence of people of different traditions and convictions about our differences and our common ground. There was certainly a good deal of common ground; otherwise the experience would have been impossible. It has been pointed out that the Rainbow Group is not representative for the relations between Jews and Christians in the world at large, neither for their relations in Israel, and that it is a circle of a happy few who somehow have been able to escape or circumvent the tensions between Jews and Christians and can afford to be friendly and open to each other as Jews and Christians. Whatever truth there may be in these observations does not detract in any way for me from the value of what I call the "Rainbow experience." Let us be honest and recognize that this experience has been possible because we are *not* representative. If we would have made the attempt to be representative, we would not have existed for very long, because the tensions would have become too high to bear.

It is not difficult to list the categories of Christians and Jews who have not been involved in the Rainbow Group. It is a long list which even so is not

exhaustive : a type of Christians or Jews who feel self-sufficient in their own orthodoxy and consider communication with people of different conviction superfluous or even dangerous; Christians who are engaged in conversionist activities among Jews, or who feel the urge to contrast the virtues of Christianity with alleged shortcomings of Judaism; Christians with deeply-ingrained anti-Jewish or antisemitic attitudes; Christians who on the one hand are enthusiastic about the State of Israel and the Ingathering of the Exiles, but on the other hand do not show any interest in what Jews really feel, think, believe or stand for, seeing them only playing a role in an essentially Christian eschatological drama; Christians, especially Arab Christians, who avoid real communication with Jews due to the bitterness and divisiveness of the Jewish-Arab Conflict; Christians who feel animosity and hostility towards Jews, because of the national and political implications of Jewish identity. Turning further to the Jews who are not represented in the Rainbow Group there are those who in the light of the bad relations between Christians and the Jews in the past, feel no desire to get into touch with Christians, but wish to be left alone, precisely in Israel where they are free from the pressure of Christianity. There are others who make even a special effort to curb any Christian presence or activity in Israel which they see as threats. Such people are not found among Rainbow Group members, nor are those Jews who, coming from Islamic countries, had never anything to do with Christians, nor many Jews born in Israel who can grow up in this country without ever coming into contact with Christians. The list not represented in the Rainbow Group could be made much longer.

It is certainly valid to argue that this situation is not bad in itself, since any movement which seeks to promote understanding between hostile groups has to start on a small scale. Such was the case with the ecumenical movement in the churches. But it is important that such a movement have a clear idea of the basis on which it wants to operate. In the case of Jews and Christians who seek mutual understanding and communication, it is important to be clear about the common ground on which they meet and the bond which ties them together. It is not enough that we respect each other and recognize that each partner in the encounter has the right of self-definition. It is a ground rule of any real encounter and dialogue that one party does not try to define the other according to its own concepts attempting to fit him or her in its own system. We say in the Rainbow Group that we agree to disagree. But in order to be able to disagree there must be a common underlying ground where we basically agree. As Jews and Christians we are disagreeing about *something*, but the fact that there is something to disagree about, is an indication of a common ground, on which we — disagreeing — are standing. We are not merely together in the Rainbow to make an exercise in peaceful relations but because there is a

bond which ties us together despite our disagreements and even *in* our disagreements.

I should like to try to articulate tonight a little bit what this agreement underneath our disagreements is. This may serve as a postscript to my almost thirteen years of living in Jerusalem as a Christian theologian, and as a preface to the new task which awaits me in the Martin Buber House in Heppenheim (West-Germany) as general secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews.

Common to us, Jews and Christians, is the belief that the human person lives by the word of God. But how does God speak to us? Here we encounter seemingly a basic difference. For Jews the word of God *par excellence* is the Torah given to Israel on Mount Sinai in the double form of the Written and Oral Torah. According to the Midrash, the voice of God on Sinai was echoed in seven voices. And the seven voices changed into seventy languages, so that all the nations could hear the Word of God. Therefore nobody needs to be without the Word of God. Every human being can live by the word of God. For Christians the Word of God *par excellence* is Jesus Christ, the Word of God that became flesh, *basar wa-dam*, in Jesus Christ. His Spirit was poured out on all flesh — as is indicated in the story of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles — so that each heard his own tongue about the mighty works of God. Nobody needs to be without the Word of God. Every human being can therefore live by the Word of God. The Word of God, whether understood in a Jewish or a Christian sense, has universal meaning.

On the one hand there is the Torah, on the other hand Jesus Christ, both being claimed as the universal Word of God. Are these not conflicting claims? Is disagreement not the last word here? Where is the underlying agreement? The disagreement is even exacerbated by the often-made Christian claim that Jesus is the true Word, overruling and superseding the Torah, and that the Torah is only foreshadowing the final revelation of the Word of God, and is bound to lose its ultimate validity in the presence of Jesus Christ. Here we have the replacement or substitution theology which has been so characteristic of Christian teaching throughout the ages, and in fact excluded any real meaningful relationships with Jews and Judaism on an equal and dignified footing. If Jews are to be pitied because they have not yet seen the true light, then that is the end to a real bond of mutual respect and acceptance.

As a Christian who has encountered Jews and Judaism and has seen something of the depth of Jewish spiritual experience and become aware of the

ultimate meaning of the Torah in Jewish faith, I am compelled to rethink Christian theology of substitution and replacement, I have constantly been confronted with the question: Is it possible for me as a Christian, from the depth of my faith commitment to Jesus Christ, to affirm the Jewish people and Judaism sincerely, really and truly, instead of rejecting, if not the Jewish people, then at least Judaism? The horrendous failure of Christianity with regard to the Jewish people throughout the ages and especially during the Holocaust, and the miraculous preservation of "Judaism despite Christianity" (to use the title under which the correspondence between Eugen Rosenstock and Franz Rosenzweig has been published in English), ought to be for us the "finger of God" warning us to seek ways to come to terms with the existence and the meaning of the Jewish people and Judaism, so that as Christians we can really affirm these. How can we do this theologically, that is to say, remaining faithful to the revelation which we as Christians have received?

We believe in Jesus Christ as the Word of God. What is the content of the Word of God? What does God say to us in this Word? There have been many attempts to express this *'al regel ahat*, concisely, within the time that one can stand on one leg. One of the earliest of them is the verse in the Book of Micah (6:8): "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with God?" This is the destination of man. This is the full realization of man as the image of God. One may say that the whole purpose of the Torah is to lead to the realization of the image of God in the people of Israel and ultimately in the whole of humanity, so that what is good becomes reality: doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. The basic meaning and motive power of the *halakhah* is to produce such a human community. As someone who believes in Jesus Christ as the Word of God that has become flesh, *basar wa-dam*. I see in this one person — not yet, however in a whole community — the image of God already realized: in his life and his teaching, in his suffering and death. In a variation on the words of Micah: God showed us in Jesus Christ what is good; in him God has showed us what is doing justice, what is loving kindness and what is walking humbly with God. When I read the Gospels it is this which emerges from the picture drawn of Jesus.

But this picture is a Jewish picture. The Sermon of the Mount strongly resembles the teachings of the Rabbis of the first century before and the first century of the Christian era. To be sure, Jesus' teachings are not identical with theirs, but also the teachings of the Rabbis are not identical with each other. His teaching was a profound Jewish teaching. He lived a Jewish life, prayed Jewish prayers, observed the *mitzvot*, went to the synagogue,

learned Torah and added his interpretations to the full spectrum of Torah interpretations of his time. He shared in Jewish hopes and expectations, although he may have rejected certain political expressions of these expectations, as did other Rabbis. As a Christian I affirm that in this Jewish life, in this Jewish teaching, in this wholly Jewish behaviour the word of God was exemplified. In all this is shown what it is to be created in the image of God. The image of God was realised in this one person.

But Jesus died a violent death. He fell victim to the powers of evil. If in him the image of God was realised, then it was cruelly destroyed. It is actually unclear why Jesus was killed. Was the charge of rebellion based on actual fact? Did he think that the time of redemption was at hand? And that the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) were going to be realised: the poor in spirit receiving the Kingdom of Heaven; the mourners being comforted; the meek inheriting the earth; those that hunger and thirst after righteousness being filled, and the pure in heart seeing God? And that God was going to act through him to bring all this about? Was this the reason why the title of Messiah was given to him? The gospels are rather reticent about it. In any case his martyrdom was a Jewish martyrdom. As so many other Jews, he died on a Roman cross. By presenting his word in flesh, in *basar wa-dam*, in this Jew who was God's image realized, God accepted utter vulnerability. In this way of speaking of humanity, in this human form, God exposed himself to the forces of evil. He accepted that Jesus, the One who had properly responded to his call to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God, was exposed to the forces of sin, death and destruction. The outcome was that Jesus died a martyr, joining the ranks of those of this people who had undergone the same fate, before him and after him.

At this point there is that crucial event with which the Christian faith stands and falls: the Resurrection. Through this event the discovery is made by Jesus' disciples, or rather, the revelation comes over them, that the image of God cannot be destroyed: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). Jesus was resurrected. The resurrection means that the path of the Torah is the right one, that the word of God which calls us to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God, can be trusted, discloses future for us and is a source of hope. Faith in Jesus Christ means accepting this word, basing oneself on the fundamental assumption and taking the stubborn stance, that the image of God cannot be destroyed: not in any fellow-man or woman (and therefore I am required to come to his or her defence when his or her human dignity is threatened and the image of God in him or her is violated); nor can the image of God be destroyed in myself, even not when I sink down into utter sin and find

the forces of evil working in myself. Because of the resurrection my sin and deficiency do not drive me to despair of myself. The precious of the image of God in fellow human beings and in myself is proclaimed in the resurrection of Jesus.

What does this mean with regard to the Jewish people? Jesus did not abolish the Torah, but fulfilled its deepest intention. The resurrection means that Jesus was vindicated as a Jew, as one who was faithful to the Torah, as a martyr who participated in Jewish martyrdom for the sake of heaven (*Kiddush ha-Shem*). What else can this mean than that the Torah remains valid, and the Jewish people is vindicated as God's beloved people. By resurrecting Jesus God affirms his promises as well as his commandments to the Jewish people. Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated that by believing in Jesus Christ, Jews would be exempted from observing the *mitzvot*. In the past the Jewish people have always been connected by Christians with the death of Jesus: they were wrongly and unjustly accused of being Christ-killer or even of deicide ("God murder"). I see the Jewish people in the light of the resurrection. The survival of the Jewish people throughout the centuries I see in the light of what the resurrection means, namely: the affirmation of the Torah, the affirmation of Israel, and the affirmation of the meaning of the Jewish existence. Therefore a christian-theological affirmation of the Jewish people ought to belong to the very centre of the Christian faith. If I nowadays see that the Jewish people gets a new chance to survive and to revive, presently through the existence of the State of Israel, I must see this in the light of the resurrection of Christ, and praise God for his faithfulness to the Jewish people and his purpose with humanity. Needless to say that this does not mean giving a blank cheque to the State of Israel.

If this is true, how must we explain the bitter controversy between Jews and Christians throughout history? It seems that it has been brought about by two issues which were interconnected. The first issue was, if the times had qualitatively been changed by the event of the divine vindication of Jesus the Jew in the resurrection, in other words, if through this event the Messianic Era had been ushered in. The early Christian community affirmed this, and consequently expected a speedy consummation of this central event in the full realization of the image of God in the whole of humanity, as this already had taken place in this one person, Jesus. It expected a speedy realization of the Kingdom of God on earth, and therefore were inclined to attach less value to a continued distinctive existence of the Jewish people bearing the yoke of the Torah, since the whole earth was about to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. The majority of the Jewish people did not see it this way and saw its distinctive task not yet coming to its end.

The second issue was, whether *gentiles* who had experienced the joy of the resurrection and thus had come to trust and obey the word of God, and through Jesus, had seen “what is good” and been called to do “what God requires of man,” namely “to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God” — whether these gentiles could only be welcomed into the people of the God of Israel and take part in the covenant with Israel, if they first became Jews, received the sign of the covenant, the circumcision, and accepted the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, i.e., the *mitzvot*. This was not only an issue between the Jesus Movement and the other Jews, but even an internal controversy within the circles of the followers of Jesus. Paul and others maintained that in the era initiated by the resurrection of Christ setting into motion the full realization of the image of God in the whole of humanity, it was wrong to force gentiles to accept the *mitzvot*. He was convinced that Jews and Gentiles each in their own ways could participate in the movement towards the Kingdom of Heaven, and “being in Christ” was sufficient and did not require Gentiles to go through a conversion to Judaism, in order to join Israel in this movement.

These were issues that were very important in the first century, and the split between the Jesus Movement and the rest of the Jewish people was in fact unavoidable. But after Judaism and Christianity have developed over a period of nearly 2000 years each in their own way, these issues do not seem to have the same importance any more, mainly because the eschatological tension and time perspective which existed in early Christianity has drastically changed in the subsequent history of the Church, which in addition became predominantly gentile. Now the emphasis must be laid on the very basic things which Judaism and Christianity have in common and which should overshadow the differences, without, however, bringing a synthesis between them. No plea for syncretism is made here! Let us summarise :

Observing the Torah means taking upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, going in the direction of the full realization of the image of God in the community by Israel, and ultimately in all humanity. As Christians we cannot claim that we are closer to that final destination than the Jews are. We are both on the way to it. When a Christian says “Christ!” the Jew says “Torah!” The Christian is inspired by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, the Jew is inspired by the gift of the Torah, which is clear proof that God has not given up on humanity but considers the human person and community dignified and adequate to take up the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, even if human beings seem to offer very little ground for God’s confidence in them.

To use the simile of the way or path, God is going a way with humanity, beginning with Abraham, the *derekh 'adonay*, the Way of the Lord (cf. Genesis 18:19), which will come to fulfilment in the Kingdom of God, when the image of God will be realized in humanity. There are at least two gates, two openings to this Way of the Lord. The one is the Torah, the other is Jesus Christ. It seems difficult for Jews and Christians — but more difficult for Christians than for Jews — to admit that the gate through which they have entered the Way of the Lord may not be the only gate. The experience of the grace of being placed on the Way of the Lord is so overwhelming and great that it fills the whole horizon for a person and a community, so that nothing else can be compared with it or considered of equal worth. But can one community claim exclusivity and universality for its own experience of God's grace? Against the exclusivism in both Judaism and Christianity and the claim of possessing the truth, stands the conviction of Franz Rosenzweig, that the ultimate truth — which is none other than God's love for us — encompasses and possesses us, and that each in our own way we are called to respond to the truth as it comes to us, to take part in the truth and to realize our share in the truth in our own lives.

It is, therefore, a privilege to me to serve in an organization — the International Council of Christians and Jews — in which Jews and Christians are united in a common task, each against the background of their own tradition and history. It is the task of recognizing and appreciating the image of God in every human being, of overcoming the hatred and estrangement of the past between us as Jews and Christians and of walking together following our common calling to go on the *derekh 'adonay*, each drinking from our own sources as well as from our common source.

This article is based on a paper delivered by the author at the last meeting of the Jerusalem Rainbow Meeting which he attended as its secretary, as he left Jerusalem where he had served as the Netherlands Reformed Church's theological adviser, as executive secretary of the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel and as editor of *Immanuel — A Bulletin of Religious Thought and Research in Israel*, in order to take up the position of general secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews in the Martin Buber House, Heppenheim, Federal Republic of Germany, in the summer of 1980.