

behind false adulthood join him in becoming childlike again. It is no empty metaphor, but the inmost reality of Christianity, that we have received the Spirit of filiation who enables us to cry, "Abba, Father! This Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15f.). Such a mystery places us beyond the antithesis between play and seriousness. Nothing is more serious and more demanding of responsibility for God than the creation of the world, but his wisdom, who stands at his side, takes the whole business as a game: "When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a favorite child, and I was daily his delight and played before him always, playing over the face of the earth, and my delight was in the sons of men" (Prov 8:29ff.). A game which leads to the scourging and the crowning with thorns, yet does not cease to be play and delight. And we, the other children, are invited to play along in this very game.*—*Translated by Adrian Walker* □

The new covenant: A theology of covenant in the New Testament

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

When it is said of man that he is the image of God, it indicates that he is the being designed for being-in-relation.

I. Testament or covenant? From analysis of the word to the formulation of the question

We call the slender book which constitutes the foundation of Christian faith the "New Testament." This book, however, refers at the same time to another, which we simply call "Scripture," or "the Scriptures," meaning the Bible, which has grown throughout the history of the Jewish people until the coming of Christ, and which Christians call the "Old Testament." The whole of Scripture, on which the Christian faith rests, thus appears as a two-tiered testament addressed by God to man, a proclamation of his will to the world. The word "testament" was not attached extrinsically to the Scriptures, but rather drawn from within them: the title given by Christians to the two books does not merely intend to describe their essential meaning in retrospect, but rather to bring to light the interior thread of Scripture itself and to identify the basic word which provides the key to the whole. With this word, which arises from its very source, we are attempting somehow to sum up conclusively the "essence of Christianity."

But is the Latin word *testamentum* correctly chosen? Does it indeed translate the underlying words of the Hebrew and Greek texts; or does it lead us on a false track? The problematic of the translation becomes clear when we contrast the

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Old Latin version with that of St. Jerome. Whereas the former speaks of *testamentum*, Jerome decides to use *foedus* or *pactum*.¹ As a title the word "testament" was successful; but when we refer to the meaning it contains, we follow Jerome and speak of old and new covenant. This holds true in theology as well as in liturgy. Which, then, is correct? What does the Bible actually speak of when using the word? Concerning the etymology of the Hebrew word *b'rit*, scholars have failed to agree; the intrinsic meaning intended by the biblical authors can be determined only by the inner coherence of the text. A significant clue to the understanding of the word arises from the fact that the Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible have translated 267 out of 287 passages in which *b'rit* occurs, with *διαθήκη* which would be the equivalent of *σπονδή* (pact) or *συνθήκη* (covenant).² Their theological insight into the text apparently led them to the conclusion that the biblical facts did not refer to a *syn-theke*—a mutual agreement—but to a *dia-theke*—a decree—in which two wills do not unite, but *one* establishes an order. It is my understanding that today's exegesis agrees that the authors of the Septuagint have understood the sense of the biblical text correctly.³ What we now call "covenant" is not understood in the Bible as a symmetrical relationship between partners who enter into a contractual agreement imposing mutual obligations and sanctions. Such an idea of a partnership on an equal plane is incompatible with the biblical concept of God. It was rather the assumption of the translators that man on his own is altogether incapable of forming a relationship with God, much less of stipulating terms, or of constraining him by obligations based on his own performance. When it comes to a relationship between God and man, it can come about only by a free decision of God, whose sovereignty remains unassailable. We are dealing here with a totally asymmetric relationship, for God in relation to a creature is and remains the Utterly Other. The covenant then is not a pact built on reciprocity, but rather a gift, a creative act of God's love. With this statement we are already exceeding the scope of our philosophical inquiry. Although the form of the covenant is modeled

¹M. Weinfeld, "Berit," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* I, ed. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, 781-808, esp. 785.

²Ibid.

³This becomes clear in the important article by Weinfeld, as well as in G. Quell and J. Behm, "Διαθήκη," in *ThWNT* II: 105-37.

after the Hittite and Assyrian state alliances in which the feudal lord bestows right upon his vassals, God's covenant with Israel constitutes more than that. The God-king receives nothing from man but, by the gift of his law, confers on him the path to life.

Here a question arises. The Old Testament type of covenant corresponds strictly to the type made between lord and vassal, thus possessing an asymmetric structure. However, the dynamic of the image of God changes the nature of the process from within and the sense of the sovereign decree. If now the essential character of the act is no longer expressed in contractual terms but in those of spousal love—as is the case in the prophets, most movingly in Ezekiel 16—and if the contractual alliance appears to be a love-story between God and his chosen people, does then the asymmetry in its old form still remain? It is of course true that marriage in the ancient Eastern world was not conceived of as a relationship between partners, but in a patriarchal sense, with the husband as lord. Nevertheless, the prophetic portrayal of God's passionate love transcends the purely juridical structure then common in the East. On the one hand, God's infinite otherness must appear as the most radical intensification of this asymmetry. On the other hand, the true nature of *this* God seems to create quite an unexpected two-sidedness.

Here we catch a first glimpse of the philosophical treatment of the covenant theme in the history of Christian theology. Philosophically speaking, the category that corresponds to covenant, which is an image derived from the field of law, is *relatio*. Coming from a very different standpoint, ancient thought understood that the *relatio* between God and man could only be asymmetric. This followed from the metaphysical logic of Greek philosophy which held that the immutable God could not enter into mutable relationships, and that relation is something proper to mutable man. With regard to a relationship between God and man one can therefore speak only of a *relatio non mutua*, a being toward one another without reciprocity: man relates to God but not God to man. The logic appears to be inevitable. Eternity demands immutability, and immutability excludes relationships which reach into and refer to time. But does not the message of the covenant tell us the very opposite? Before we pursue any further questions arising from the analysis of the word *b'rit*, we should address the most important New Testament texts dealing with the covenant. We shall then be confronted by a new question: what distinguished the "old"

covenant from the "new"? Wherein lies the unity and wherein the distinction in the concept of covenant in the two testaments?

II. Covenant in the two testaments

1. Covenant and covenants in St. Paul

Within the prescribed framework it is, of course, impossible to attempt an inquiry into the New Testament theology of the covenant in all its breadth.⁴ I should merely like to shed some more light on the subject by citing examples from the principal letters of St. Paul and from the texts of the Last Supper.

What strikes one initially in Paul's epistles is the clear-cut demarcation between the covenant of Christ and that of Moses, which generally denotes for us the difference between "old" covenant and "new." The sharpest contrast between the two testaments is found in Paul's 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 and Galatians 4:21-31. Whereas the term "new covenant" is rooted in the prophetic promise (Jer 31:31) and thus links both parts of the Bible, the term "old covenant" appears only in 2 Corinthians 3:14. The Letter to the Hebrews, however, speaks of a first covenant (9:15), to which it refers not only by the classic formulation of "new covenant," but also as *aeonian*, that is, "eternal covenant" (13:20). It was this wording that was inserted into the institution narrative of the Roman canon of the Mass ("new and everlasting covenant"). In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes a sharp antithesis between the covenant instituted by Christ and that instituted by Moses, the one being enduring, the other transitory. Characteristic of the Mosaic covenant is its provisional nature, which Paul sees manifested in the stone tablets of the law. Stone is an expression of that which is dead, and whoever remains merely in the domain of the law, remains in the realm of death. He must have had in mind the prophecy of Jeremiah about the new covenant being engraved in the heart, as well as that of Ezekiel about the heart of stone being replaced by the heart of flesh.⁵ If at first the text emphasizes the transito-

ry and futile nature of the Mosaic covenant, a new and altered perspective comes into play in the end: the veil shall be lifted from the heart of him who turns his face to the Lord, who then will see the interior radiance, the spiritual light, in the law and so will be able to read it correctly. The fluctuation of the images which we observe here and elsewhere in St. Paul does not allow us to observe his message to come through clearly. However, in ways allow his message to come through clearly. However, in the image of the lifting of the veil, the provisional nature of the law appears to be modified: when the veil falls from the heart, that which is enduring in the law becomes visible. It becomes spirit itself and thus identical with the new order of life arising from the spirit.

The severe antithesis of the two covenants, old and new, which Paul develops in the third chapter of his Second Letter to the Corinthians, has left its stamp on Christian thought ever since, whereas the subtle relationship between letter and law, latent in the image of the veil, has scarcely been noticed. But what has above all been forgotten has been Paul's rich disclosure of the drama of God's dealings with men in his praise of Israel in the ninth chapter of Romans. He mentions among the gifts of God to his people the "pacts" and covenants. "Covenant" appears here in the plural, according to the sapiential tradition.⁶ The Old Testament is aware of three signs of the covenant: sabbath, rainbow and circumcision. They correspond to the three stages of the covenant or three covenants. The Old Testament knows of the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the covenant with Israel-Jacob, the covenant at Sinai, and the covenant of God with David. All these covenants have their particular characteristics, to which we shall return later. Paul is aware that viewed from pre-Christian salvation history the word covenant must be thought and spoken of in the plural. From these various covenants he has lifted out two in particular, contrasting one to the other and relating each in its own way to the covenant of Christ: namely, the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with Moses. He regards the covenant with Abraham as the essential one, fundamental and enduring. The covenant with Moses, 430 years later (Gal 3:17), is for Paul "intervening" (Rom 5:20). Nevertheless, it could not invalidate the covenant with Abraham, but only present an intermediate stage of the

⁴This text was prepared for a series of lectures at the Academie des sciences morales et politiques, Paris, on the theme of "Contract, Pact, Covenant." A. Chouraqui presented the Old Testament concept of covenant, while I was asked to deliver the New Testament counterpart.

⁵Cf. R. Bultmann, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen, 1976), 76.

⁶Romans 9:4. Cf. H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (1977), 287.

guiding ways of God. It is the way in which God teaches men, where the stretches of the road gradually fall away once the pedagogical goal has been achieved. The road is left behind, the meaning remains: the covenant of Moses is incorporated into that of Abraham, the law becomes a means to the promise. Thus Paul sharply distinguishes between the two types of covenant as we encounter them in the Old Testament: the covenant which is a statute of law, and the covenant which is essentially promise, a gift of friendship, given unconditionally.⁷ In the Pentateuch the word *b'rit* is simply synonymous with law and commandment: a *b'rit* is commanded. The covenant at Sinai appears in Exodus 24 primarily as an "imposition of laws and obligations on the people."⁸ Such a covenant can also be broken. The history of Israel repeatedly appears in the Old Testament as a history of the broken covenant. In contrast, the covenant with the patriarchs is considered eternally valid. Whereas the covenant of obligation was patterned after that of lord and vassal, the covenant of promise takes the royal donation for its model.⁹ In this respect Paul correctly interpreted the text of the Bible by establishing a distinction between the covenant of Abraham and that of Moses. However, by this distinction, the sharp contrast between old and new covenant is now canceled, and a new and dynamic unity of the entire history is proclaimed, in which the *one* covenant is realized in the covenants. If such is the case, it is no longer possible to contrast Old and New Testament as two separate religions. There exists only *one* divine intervention in history. It is carried out in differentiated and sometimes even contradictory operations, which, nevertheless, belong to each other in truth.

2. *The idea of the covenant in the texts of the Last Supper*

With the multiplicity and interrelatedness of the covenants and the unity of the covenant, we have arrived at the center of our inquiry. Here we must proceed with particular care because deep-rooted Jewish and Christian habits of thought are in question, which have to be elucidated by the original biblical message and corrected in part by it. Decisive for the understanding of the New Testament concept of covenant are the Last

⁷Weinfield, "Berit," 799ff.

⁸Ibid., 784.

⁹Ibid., 799.

Supper narratives. They present, so to speak, the New Testament counterpart to the establishment of the covenant at Sinai (Ex 24), and thus constitute the Christian faith in the new covenant which has been sealed in Christ. We need not here go into the complex and always debatable exegetical discussions on the relationship between text and event, on how the texts came to be, and on their chronological order, but merely need to investigate what the texts, as they stand, have to say in regard to our questions. It is undisputed that the four institution narratives (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:15-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26) can be divided into two groups according to their textual form and the theology which they represent: the tradition of Mark and Matthew, and that of Paul and Luke. The principal difference between the two is to be found in the words pronounced over the cup. In Matthew and Mark it says: "this is my blood of the covenant which is being shed for many." Matthew then adds, "for the forgiveness of sins." However, in Luke and Paul it is the content of the cup which is so described: "this cup is the new covenant in my blood." Luke adds, "which has been shed for you." "Covenant" and "blood" are thus grammatically differentiated from each other. With Matthew and Mark, the gift of the cup is "the blood," which is then specified as the "blood of the covenant." In Paul and Luke, the cup is the "new covenant," of which it is said that it is founded "in my blood." A second difference should be mentioned: namely, that Luke and Paul alone speak of the new covenant. A third and important difference lies in the fact that only Matthew and Mark use the term, "for many." The two strands of tradition are based upon covenant traditions of the Old Testament, but choose different points of departure. In that manner all the essential ideas of the covenant converge into the totality of the words spoken at the Last Supper, where they coalesce into a new unity.

What traditions are we dealing with here? The words of consecration in Matthew and Mark derive directly from the narrative of the founding covenant at Sinai. Moses first sprinkles the victim's blood on the altar, which by substitution represents the hidden God, and then onto the people, saying "this is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex 24:8). Age-old conceptions are here incorporated and raised to a higher level. G. Quell has defined the archaic idea of the covenant as it appears in the stories of the Fathers thus: "... to establish a covenant required entering into a foreign blood-union as well as admitting

the partner into one's own community, to try legally to establish kinship with him." The fictitious kinship of blood thus created "changes the partners into brothers of flesh and bone." "The covenant effects a unity which is peace"¹⁰—shalom. The blood-rite at Sinai signifies that God acts in the same manner with his people during their trek across the desert, something hitherto enacted only by various tribal groups. He foresees a mysterious consanguinity with men, so that henceforth he belongs to them and they to him. It is true that this kinship paradoxically comes to be between God and man, and is characterized by the proclaimed word, the book of the covenant. By adoption of this word, which is life from God and with God, emerges the kinship established in the ritual cult of blood. Where Jesus, presenting the cup to his disciples, says "this is my blood of the covenant," the words of Sinai are intensified to an overwhelming realism and simultaneously reveal a hitherto inconceivable depth.

What happens here is spiritualization and utter realism at the same time. For this sacramental communion of blood, which has now become possible, unites the recipient with this bodily man Jesus, and thus with his divine mystery, in a totally concrete and even physical communion. Paul has described the new consanguinity with God which results from this union by a bold and dramatic comparison: "Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two shall become one flesh' (Gen 2:24). But he who is united to the Lord becomes *one spirit* (one *pneuma*) with him" (1 Cor 6:16). In this saying, however, the entirely different manner of kinship becomes clear. The sacramental union with Christ, and hence with God, draws man out of his own material and transitory world and sweeps him up into the Being of God, which the apostle paraphrases with the word *pneuma*. The God who has descended draws man up into his uniqueness and newness. Kinship with God represents a new and profoundly altered stage of human existence.

But how is this communication of his very self to men made possible? From the covenant at Sinai we have seen that by accepting the word, the law of God, we are incorporated into his mode of Being. No direct mention of this is made in the texts of the Lord's Supper. Instead we encounter here the

phrase which evokes the Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53: "which is shed for many." Thus the prophetic tradition and the tradition of Sinai are joined and interpreted. Jesus incorporates the destiny of others into his own, he lives for them and dies for them. With the Fathers of the Church we may here safely go beyond the literal sense of the text without losing sight of its meaning. The death of Christ simply fulfills what began at the Incarnation. The Son has taken up what is human and now carries it back to God. "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me. . . Behold, I come" (Heb 10:5-7; Ps 40:7-9). From this offering to God, "blood" now comes back as covenantal blood to men. Flesh has become Word, and Word has become flesh in the act of love, which is God's very own mode of being. By sacramental participation it can now become man's mode of being. For our inquiry into the meaning of the word "covenant" it is important to realize that the Lord's Supper understands itself as a sealing of the covenant, as the continuation of Sinai which appears here not abolished but renewed. The renewal of the covenant which, from ancient times, was an essential element of Israel's liturgy,¹¹ achieves here its highest possible form. The Lord's Supper would now become an ongoing reenactment of this covenant renewal in which the regularly performed ritual actions would take on, by the authority of Jesus, a depth and density which was hitherto inconceivable. From this perspective one may understand that beyond the traditional connection of the Lord's Supper with the Paschal Mystery, both the Letter to the Hebrews and the Gospel of St. John (in the high priestly prayer of Jesus) also link the Eucharist with the Day of Atonement and see in its institution a cosmic Day of Atonement, a thought which also makes its appearance in St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (3:24ff.).¹²

Now we must briefly glance at the Lukan-Pauline tradition regarding the words pronounced over the cup. There,

¹¹In his search for the *Sitz im Leben* and the origin of the covenant at Sinai, Mowinckel has even established a thesis that this covenant is reflected in an annual celebration with theophany and proclamation of the law. Cf. Weinfeld, "Berit," 793ff.

¹²The connection between John 17 and the liturgy of Yom Kippur is emphatically shown in A. Feuillet, *Le sacerdoce du Christ et ses ministres* (Paris, 1972), esp. 39-63. Also important is H. Gese, "Die Sühne," in *Zur biblischen Theologie* (Munich, 1977), 85-106, esp. 105ff.

as we have observed, the contents of the cup are described as "the new covenant in my blood." Thus the prophetic line of tradition culminating in Jeremiah 31:31-34, which takes as its point of departure "my covenant they have broken" (Jer 31:32), is here quite unequivocally adopted. In place of the broken covenant on Sinai, God will, as the prophet says, establish a new covenant, never to be broken again, because it no longer confronts man as a book or as tablets of stone, but is engraved upon his heart. The conditional covenant, which was tied to man's fidelity to the law and thus came to be broken, is replaced by the unconditional covenant in which God binds himself irrevocably. There is no doubt that we now find ourselves in the same imaginative context that we had encountered before in the Second Letter to the Corinthians with its antithesis between the two covenants. It indeed emerges more clearly in the institution formula that the issue is not simply the Old and New Testaments opposing each other as two separate worlds, but that the image of the broken covenant and of another covenant founded by God was always present in the faith of Israel. By the exhortations of the prophets, by the abolition of the temple cult during the generations of the exile, as well as by the ever recurring afflictions which followed, Israel knew only too well that the covenant had been broken more than once. The shattered tablets at the foot of Mt. Sinai were the first dramatic expression of the shattered covenant. When, after the exile, the restored tablets were lost forever, it grew all the more apparent that the disaster of that loss had assumed a permanent character. Israel knew that even though it celebrated again and again the renewal of the covenant, it could not regain the lost tablets, which God alone had the power to give and to inscribe. But it also knew that God had not withdrawn his love from Israel. It knew, too, that God himself renewed the covenant, and that the promise of the new one not only lay in the future but, because of God's unshakable love, had always embraced the present as well.¹³ By the same token, Chris-

¹³Cf. *Der Neue Bund im Alten. Zur Bundestheologie der beiden Testamente*, ed. E. Zenger (Freiburg, 1993), especially the contribution of C. Dohmen, "Der Sinai-bund als Neuer Bund nach Ex 19-34," 51-83, and A. Schenker, "Der nie aufgehobene Bund," 85-112. Cf. also, E. Zenger, *Das Erste Testament. Die jüdische Bibel und die Christen* (Düsseldorf, 1994); and the collected review by H. Seebaß and reply by E. Zenger in *Theol. Revue* 90 (1994): 265-78. This has been beautifully formulated by H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, 340: "to everyone who is an Ἰσραηλίτης belongs the radiance of hope, salvation, and homecoming."

tians should know that the finality of the new covenant as encountered in the flesh and blood of the Risen Christ, indestructible as it is, does not make irrelevant their own faithful conduct. Renewal of the covenant has not become superfluous in the new covenant, but is precisely characteristic of it. The mandate to repeat the words of the Last Supper, which are the expression of the new covenant, means that the new covenant continually presents its newness to men, that it remains forever new, and that, being new, it is always one and the same covenant.¹⁴

III. Results

Having attempted to highlight the fundamental elements from the New Testament idea of covenant in Pauline theology, as well as in the words of the institution narratives, we must now review and clarify the answers that we have found to the two principal questions we have encountered on our journey through the texts: namely, how do the different covenants relate to each other, and specifically, how does the new covenant relate to the covenants we have encountered in the Scriptures of Israel? And finally, what is the definitive relationship between testament and covenant, which is the answer to the question of the unilateral or bilateral nature of the event?

1. Unity of the covenant and multiplicity of covenants

Christian tradition has conceived of Pauline theology, as well as the Last Supper narrative, generally in terms of two covenants, the old and the new. This contrast is characterized by a series of antitheses. The old covenant is particular, referring to the "fleshly" descendants of Abraham, the new covenant is universal, extending to all nations. The old covenant rests on a principle of ethnicity, whereas the new is founded in a spiritual kinship as manifested in sacrament and faith. The old covenant is conditional; because it is founded on the observance of the law, and is thus essentially bound to man's conduct, it can be and has been broken. Because its basic content is the law, it relies upon the formula: "if you do this. . . ." This "if" connects

¹⁴It seems to me that this is what Hebrews 3:13 means when it applies to Christians the "today" of Psalm 95 and its warning about that hardness of heart which leads to loss of the "land of rest."

the mutable human will with the essence of the covenant itself, thus making it a provisional covenant. In contrast, the covenant sealed at the Last Supper appears as fundamentally new in the sense of prophetic promise. It is not a conditional contract, but a gift of friendship, irrevocably conferred. Law is replaced by grace. The rediscovery of Pauline theology during the Reformation emphasized precisely this point: not works, but faith, not the performance of man, but a free decree of God's goodness. For this reason the Reformation particularly stressed that the issue was not a "covenant," but a "testament," a pure decree of God.¹⁵ The reference to the unique efficacy of God, especially the *solus* phrases (*solus Deus, solus Christus*), are to be understood in this context.

What shall we say to this in the light of our present inquiry? It seems to me that two constituent facts have emerged, which complement the one-sidedness of these antitheses and bring to light the interior unity of God's history as it appears throughout the entire Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. To begin with, it should be remembered that the basic covenant with Abraham exhibits a universalist tendency, looking ahead to the many who would be given to Abraham as sons. Paul knew well that the covenant with Abraham united within itself deliberate universality and free gift. In this respect, the promise of Abraham guarantees from the beginning the inner continuity of salvation history, from the patriarchs of Israel to the coming of Christ and the Church of Jews and Gentiles. As far as the covenant of Sinai is concerned, we have to differentiate once again. It refers strictly to the people of Israel, bestowing a legal and cultic order (both are inseparable) on this people, which as such cannot simply be extended to all nations. Since for the covenant of Sinai this juridical order is constitutive, the "if" of the observed law belongs to the very fiber of its being; and since it is conditional—which also means temporal—it is a stage in the decrees of God, which has its own time. All this Paul has brought out clearly, and no Christian can revoke it; history itself confirms this view. But yet not everything has been said about the covenant of Moses or about "Israel according to the

¹⁵Extremely clear in the *ThWNT* article by Quell and Behm. Cf. also the article, "Bund," by Hempel, Goppelt, Jacob, and Wiesner, in *REG I* (1957): 1512-23.

flesh." For the law is not merely an imposed burden as we think in the one-sided emphasis of the Pauline antithesis. In the view of the Old Testament believer the law itself is the concrete form of grace. For it is grace to know God's will. To know God's will means to know oneself, it means to understand the world and to know where we are going. It means that we are liberated from the darkness of our endless questioning, that the light has come without which we cannot see or walk. "To no other nation have you revealed your will": for Israel, at least for its best representatives, the law is the becoming visible of God's truth and God's countenance, and thus the possibility of living justly. For this is the question we all ask: who am I? where am I going? what shall I do to make my life right? The hymn to God's word, which we find in Psalm 119 in ever new variations, expresses this joy of being redeemed, of knowing God's will, which is our truth and hence our way—in short, that which all men seek.

From this perspective one can understand what Paul means when in Galatians 6:2—following Jewish messianic hope—he speaks of the Torah of the Messiah, the Torah of Christ. Even after Paul, the Christ, the Messiah, does not deprive man of law and of rights. It is rather characteristic of the Messiah as the greater Moses to bring about the definitive interpretation of the Torah, in which the Torah itself becomes renewed, because now its true sense becomes visible in its purity and its character as grace becomes undisguised reality. H. Schlier refers to this in his commentary on Galatians: "The Torah of Jesus the Messiah is in fact an 'interpretation' by the Cross of Jesus the Messiah." His authority "permits the law to be revealed in its essential word, as the original, life-giving address of him who has fulfilled it."¹⁶ The Torah of the Messiah is Jesus the Messiah himself. To him refers the command, "Listen to him!" Thus the "law" becomes universal, thus it is grace, thus it establishes a people who become such by hearing and turning to it. In this Torah, which is Jesus himself, that which was engraved in the stone tablets of Sinai is now transcribed into living flesh: the dual commandment of love which is seen in the mind of Jesus (Phil 2:5). To imitate and follow him is therefore observance of the Torah, which in him is irrevocably fulfilled.

Thus the covenant of Sinai has indeed been sur-

¹⁶H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (Göttingen, 1962), 273.

passed, and now that its preliminary character has been shed, its true finality comes to light. For this reason, the expectation of the new covenant which emerges from Israel's history with increasing clarity does not oppose the covenant of Sinai, but corresponds to the dynamics of that which is contained in it. According to Jesus' perspective, the law and the prophets do not stand in opposition to each other, for Moses himself is a prophet, and can be understood correctly only if understood prophetically.

2. "Testament" and covenant

The question of whether we are dealing here with covenant or testament, with a bilateral event or a unilateral decree, is closely connected with the difference between the covenant of Christ and the covenant of Moses. According to their basic structure, all types of covenants, as we encounter them in the Old and New Testaments, are initially asymmetric as decrees of the sovereign, not as contracts between two equal partners. The law is a decree by which the king binds his vassals, thus making them such; grace is a decree which is given freely, without preceding merit. This idea of the unilateral or one-sided nature of the testament corresponds, no doubt, to the idea of the greatness and sovereignty of God. It is equally true that it is conditioned by a social structure. The rulers of the ancient East act exclusively in a unilateral, sovereign manner. Nobody can be on the same level with them. However, it is precisely this sociological background of an asymmetric order which in the Bible is torn open and dispelled. In that way the image of God, too, receives a new form. God decrees, but there exists, practically from the very beginning, a self-commitment of God, which allows something like a partnership to come into being. Augustine has expressed this aspect beautifully when he says:

Faithful is God who made himself our debtor, not as if he had received something from us, but by promising so much to us. That promise was too little for him, thus he wanted to commit himself in writing too, by giving us, as it were, a hand-written version of his promises.¹⁷

In reading the prophets, we discover that this is not merely considered an external, positive act, but that the faith of Israel recognizes in this self-commitment the very being of God, different

from that of an oriental ruler. "When Israel was a child, I loved him," says God in Hosea, regarding his manner of self-commitment to the people. From this it follows that he cannot abandon the covenant due to his very being, even when it is repeatedly broken. "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (Hos 11:18-8). What is sketched here in brief strokes is elaborated into a great history of futile but indestructible—and therefore, in the end, not so futile—love in Ezekiel 16. The entire drama of unfaithfulness on the part of the people ends with the words: "that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done" (Ez 16:63).

All these texts are preceded by the mysterious story of the establishment of the covenant with Abraham at which, according to Eastern custom, the tribal chief divides in two the sacrificial animals. The covenantal partners then walk between the halved animals, casting symbolically a conditional curse upon themselves: "as it happens to these animals, so it will happen to me, if I break this covenant." In a vision, Abraham sees a smoking furnace and a flaming torch, both images of theophany, passing between these sacrificial animals. God thus seals the covenant with an unmistakable death symbol, and vouches for it himself. But can God die? Can he punish himself? Christian exegesis has seen in this text a mysterious and formerly inexplicable sign of the Cross of Christ, in which God vouches for the indestructibility of the covenant with the death of his Son, thus radically committing himself to man (Gen 15:12-21). Love of the creature belongs to God's very being, and from this being arises his self-commitment, which extends all the way to the Cross. Thus within the horizon of the Bible, there clearly emerges, from the unconditional nature of God's action, a true "two-sidedness": the testament becomes covenant. The Fathers of the Church have described this new two-sided relationship, resulting from faith in Christ as fulfiller of the promises, with a pair of concepts, namely, the Incarnation of God and the divinization of man. The self-commitment of God therefore surpasses the mediating word of promise. It surpasses it at that point where God binds his own existence to the creature, man, by taking human nature upon himself. Conversely, this means that the age-old human dream has been fulfilled, and man becomes "like God" in this exchange of natures, which constitutes

¹⁷*En. in Ps.* 109:1 (CChr 40:1601).

the fundamental christological form. The unconditional nature of the divine covenant has become a definitive two-sidedness.

3. *The image of God and man in the thought of the covenant*

Christology thus appears as a synthesis of the covenantal theology of the New Testament, which is grounded in the unity of the entire Bible. This christological concentration, however, leads necessarily beyond mere interpretation of biblical texts. The question of the essence of God arises; the quest for a rational understanding becomes necessary. It follows that theology must seek a commensurate philosophy. To carry this out is not my present task. I merely wish to return briefly to the category we have already encountered as philosophical correlative to the covenant theme: namely, *relatio*. For inquiring into the covenant surely means asking whether there could be a relationship between God and man and what it would be like. We have stated that according to the ancient pagan view, man could relate to God in a knowing and loving manner, but for the eternal God to relate to mortal man was considered a contradiction and thus an impossibility. The philosophical monotheism of the ancient world had provided access to the biblical faith in God and its religious monotheism, making possible once again the lost harmony between reason and religion. The Church Fathers, who proceeded from this correspondence between philosophy and biblical revelation, came to realize, however, that the identity of the one God of the Bible had to be essentially expressed by two predicates: creation and revelation, creation and redemption. Both, however, are relational concepts. Hence the biblical God is a God-in-relation, and thus in its essence his identity is in opposition to the self-contained God of philosophy.

This is not the place to trace the complex process of the intellectual struggle to consolidate again the correspondence of reason and religion, which had resulted from the idea of God's uniqueness and now had been called into question. I would, however, within the context of my theme, say this much: in the course of this endeavor a completely new philosophical category was forged, one which establishes for us the fundamental idea of analogy between God and man, the center of philosophical thought: the concept of person.¹⁸ An already existing category,

that of relation, was fundamentally changed in its meaning. Within the Aristotelian chart of categories, relation is listed under accidents, which refer to substance and are dependent on it. Hence, one cannot speak of accidents in God. Because of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, relation steps out of the substance-accidents schema. God himself is now described as a structure of trinitarian relationship, as *relatio subsistens*.¹⁹ When it is said of man that he is the image of God, it indicates that he is the being designed for being-in-relation, that he seeks throughout all his relationships the one relationship which is the ground of his being. In that case, covenant would be the answer to man's being made in the image of God. In it would shine forth who and what we ourselves are, and who God is. For him who is wholly relation, the covenant would not be something extraneous to history, standing apart from his being, but a revelation of his very self, "the splendor of his countenance." —*Translated by Maria Shradny* □

¹⁹Although the vast importance of the process is not yet fully elaborated, the recasting of the traditional categories is already clearly present in Augustine, *De Trin.* V, 6 (PL 42:914): "Wherefore, nothing can be said of God according to the accident, because nothing accidental can happen to him. On the other hand, not everything that is said of him is said of his substance. . . . They do not refer to the substance but to the relation, and the relation is no accident because it is not changeable."

¹⁸Beautifully formulated by C. Schönborn, in *Die Christus-Ikone* (1984), esp. 30-54.