

## THE OLD TESTAMENT AS HOLY SCRIPTURE FOR THE JEWS AND FOR CHRISTIANITY\*

*Prof Herbert Donner*

Chapter 5 of the Gospel of John states: "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me!" The one who says this is Jesus himself and the scripture which he refers to is the Old Testament. From the beginning on, Christianity has zealously followed the appeal of its Lord: it concerned itself with the Old Testament, studied it, interpreted it, and read it aloud in church services. This has been so up to our days. When one reads the Bible one will notice that the Old Testament comprises approximately two-thirds of its volume, the New Testament, on the other hand, only one-third. The Old Testament is part of the Holy Scripture of Christianity.

On the other hand: if one has ever been in a Synagogue and participated in a service one will have noticed that in the front where we have the altar, there is an elaborately decorated piece. This is the Torah-Shrine where the large hand-written scrolls are kept which, during the service, are taken out, kissed, carried around and read aloud. The books of the Old Testament are written on these scrolls, mainly the Five Books of Moses - the Torah or Pentateuch - but not only these. The congregation prays and sings the Psalms and more than once one hears "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord!" (Deut 6:4) which is sung by the cantor and taken up by the congregation. If one goes into a bookstore and asks for a Jewish Bible one receives the Old Testament in Hebrew. The Old Testament is the Holy Scripture for the Jews.

So far the matter is easily understandable. The Old Testament is Scripture for two religions: for Judaism and for Christianity. Both of them use it, refer to it, hold it in high esteem and interpret it, even though differently. The time span separating present-day Jews and Christians from the completion of the collection of the books of the Old Testament is the same: approximately 2 000 years. For the Old Testament developed during the first thousand years B C, and was completed during the first century A.D. Since then, it has been used by Jews and Christians, synagogues and churches alike.

However, this parallel use has seldom been peaceful, sometimes

\* *Lecture delivered on August 20, 1981 in the department of Biblical Studies, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, RSA.*

indifferent, but usually a disputed issue. Christians have denied the Jews the right to use the Old Testament and vice versa. There was a controversy as to the exclusive use of it. The Jews even up to now have stated that the Christian use of the Old Testament actually was unauthorized and illegitimate. The Old Testament is not the book of preparation for the revelation of God through Jesus Christ by whom salvation is brought to all peoples and to all of mankind, but it rather is the book of salvation for the Chosen People of Israel and then, without Jesus Christ, the book of salvation for the world in the latter days. The Christians, on the other hand, have always stated that the Old Testament exclusively belongs to them, and not to the Jews who have misunderstood and misused it. No lesser than the Apostle Paul, himself a Jew by origin, has expressed this in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians in a basic and marvellous manner: "But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ it is taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:14-17). (This means nothing else but that the Old Testament is a Christian book; it does not belong to the Jews, they read it wrongly, and their eyes are veiled.) Next to this however, there existed and still exists a second kind of consideration of the Old Testament, that is to say, a capitulation to its strangeness. It climaxes in the demand that one should do without this book and leave it to the Jews because it is foreign and pre-Christian, moreover it is sub-Christian. In this book, the Lord, revealing himself in Jesus Christ, does not speak, or, to use modern terms, this book does not speak in a Christian way of the Lord. This opposition against the Old Testament already begins in the second century. It can be observed during all of church history up to the present, even though its motives are changing. Adolf von Harnack, a great and scholarly theologian of the turn of the century, has expressed it as follows: "It was a grave mistake to repudiate the Old Testament in the second century, a mistake which the Great Church correctly rejected. To keep the Old Testament in the 16th century was the fate of the Reformation, to even conserve it from the 19th century onward as a canonic document in Protestantism is the consequence of a religious and ecclesiastic paralysis". (That sounds like the exact opposite of what the Apostle Paul had said about the Old Testament and what Christianity since then has often repeated and elaborated.) But one has to understand that the basic reason for the fact that Christians deny the Jews the Old Testament or that they leave it to them entirely, is the same: the revelation of the Lord in Jesus Christ. Either it is stated that the Old Testament is Christian and non-Jewish; or it is said that the Old Testament is non-Christian and hence Jewish. Jesus Christ is the point of debate;

the belief in him as the Saviour separates the religions.

(Up to now, I have described nothing more than the fact with which Judaism and Christianity have lived for many centuries: the Old Testament counts as holy document for both religions, and they both quarrel about it.) So far we move on solid ground. The ground becomes less solid when we consider what has recently developed concerning the situation. I am attempting to document and illustrate the appearing vagueness and uncertainty.

As you know, I am a professor for Old Testament study, and I have to hold seminars and courses on the Old Testament at a German university. Recently I have once again tried to make clear to students that large parts of the Five Books of Moses are not of one literary unit but rather are a compound. I tried to explain that writers from different times and different regions of ancient Palestine participated in the realization of this central part of the Old Testament. This seemed to be clear to the students, it would be very difficult not to accept the scientific reasons for this. After the seminar a female student, to whom this had also seemed plausible, came to me being anxious to know: "What do the Jews say about that? What do the Rabbis think about it? They are certainly more close to it than we are!" She did not understand my argument that the Jews are exactly as far removed as we are. She thought that actually and on closer inspection the Old Testament were a Jewish book and that for us Christians it were so to speak 'second-hand'. However, she did not deduce the demand that we should do without the Old Testament. On the contrary, if we Christians want to know what this book actually contains and what it means, we then must consult the Jews, for it belongs to them. (Furthermore, recently I had to read and grade a student's term paper which stated: "How do we pass the test in active love towards Israel which should be stronger and different from bourgeois tolerance? If we accept without restriction the Jewish No to Jesus Christ, the basic element of Jewish belief, - everything else would be a diminishment of the Lord's loyalty towards his Chosen People, a diminishment of the resurrection of the body - then our love has to embody radical, self-critical listening and learning". The consequence of these sentences is the following: Actually the Christians are Jews, only somewhat different Jews than the Jews themselves are. They are non-Jews who first have to become Jews in order to be able to be Christians. They first have to affirm the Jewish No to Christ without any restriction.)

In this difficult situation, it is justified to expect help from a basic paper which was published in 1980 as "Handreichung Nr 39" for the Synods of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland with the title "Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden" (Towards Renewing the Relationship of Christians and Jews). (Here

one can find the theses which the "Rhinian Synode" has passed by resolution.) I will try to summarize the essential points, and in doing so, I will try to let the theses have their own say as far as possible.

"For both Jews and Christians there is one common book which is 'scripture' or Bible for both." With this the Old Testament is meant. "For many Jews and, indisputably also for many Christians, the qualification of the common 'scripture' as 'old' constitutes a devaluation." Therefore, one should not use the term Old Testament. "Since the term 'Bible' is familiar to Jews, one should use the term 'Hebrew Bible' for the Old Testament in order to distinguish it from the Christian Bible which also comprises the New Testament." After this suggestion to discontinue the use of the term Old Testament, the following is said: "For Jews and Christians the Lord reveals in the Scripture who he is ... the Lord who is documented in the New Testament is the same Lord of whom the Hebrew Bible speaks ... Jews could say that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has made himself known to the peoples also by Christian preaching." It is then discussed that the Messiah-characteristic of Jesus creates the different attitudes towards the interpretation of literary the same book by Jews and Christians. The Jews read it in anticipation of the messianic salvation, the Christians in memory of the Messiah Jesus, who has already come. (The basic attitude is different.) "According to the evidence of the New Testament the belief in Jesus as the Messiah can be seen under certain circumstances as the separating issue towards the Jews who do not accept him as the Messiah. The person of Jesus however, unites Jews and Christians." Because this is so, Christianity must learn to change its way of thinking. "The 'New' in the 'New Covenant' is not the abandonment of the 'Old Covenant', but rather its confirmation in the account of Jesus of Nazareth ... in the life and deeds of Jesus, the Lord of Israel proves to all the world his unshakable faith and his absolute solidarity with his Chosen People, who answer him with their loyalty to the Torah ... (The realization that all peoples are included within Israel's history of hope by the coming of Jesus had already been abandoned in the early stages of church history.) We may no longer speak of an 'Old' and a 'New' Chosen People, but rather of a single Chosen People which follows as the Lord's Israel the call of the Lord in the future." All this should also ensue in a consequence for the Christian mission: "The everlasting calling and mission of Israel forbids the church to interpret its witness towards Israel in the same way as its mission towards all other peoples."

It can be doubted however, that these sentences would have found the approval of the Apostle Paul who wrote to the Galatians: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as

many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you all are one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Be it as it may, in any case the Rhinian theses have in the meantime started a lively and emotional discussion in Germany. One can understand this very well since, in view of our difficult, unnatural relationship towards Judaism which is also burdened with guilt and shame, nothing else can be expected. But the emotion accompanying the discussion and the guilt which weighs upon it do not further a coherence of thought and a soundness of judgement. As soon as somebody starts to think about these questions from a theological point of view, emotion and conscience have already passed their judgement in one way or the other. Words of horror such as "Auschwitz" and "Holocaust" do not contribute to a clear and unemotional analysis but on the contrary, terminate it.

However, it must become possible to articulate this without losing one's status as a serious partner in discussion. It should be acceptable to take a step back and to view things from a vantage point, just as if oneself were not concerned. It is necessary to gain a perspective of history, not that of the unfortunate history of the last fifty or one hundred years, but rather of the historical dimension of the problem which we are to solve. I am attempting to enumerate aspects of this large and exhaustible topic.

We state: The Old Testament is the Holy Scripture of the Jews and the Christians - an indisputable and correct statement which does not only answer questions but also poses them. How did this happen historically? How did the Old Testament become Scripture and for whom? One fundamental error has to be disposed right from the beginning: the writings of the Old Testament have not been Holy Scriptures from the very beginning on, and Jews did not always exist, not at the time of the formation of the Old Testament books. Looking upon things from the perspective of an historian, the following overall picture emerges:

The development of the collection of writings which we call the Old Testament extends itself almost over a millenium, the first millenium B C. In the beginning, there were single narrative accounts, proverbs, sayings and songs, later also longer narratives and historical stories - literary material of very different types, scattered accounts which by no means were compiled in a book and which dealt with the life, the history, the culture, and the religion of the ancient people of Israel. Since around 1150 B C this people lived closely together in Palestine, the narrow strip of land between the advanced civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia

tamia. It formed two states with the names Judah and Israel and very soon became the object of the dominant powers in the Near East who, in 586 B C brought about a catastrophic end to its existence. This ancient people however were of an extraordinary spiritual and religious strength and vitality. Although it was influenced by the great cultures of its neighbours, it developed autonomously in its religion. Its God Yahweh who was worshipped exclusively and unimpressed by the polytheism of its neighbouring peoples, was not primarily considered creator of heaven and earth, guarantor of the fertility of the soil. The people saw in him mainly the Lord who had done and still was doing wonderful things to them. This God Yahweh had chosen this small and insignificant people from the multitude of peoples, had made it his property, had led them out of Egypt, and guided them through the desert. He had taken a rigorous discipline and had let his will - commandments and laws - be known to them through Moses. Ultimately, he had bestowed the land of Palestine upon them and had guided the settlement and its history with a helping, saving, but also threatening and punishing hand. He had admonished and warned Israel through prophets, but had also promised their salvation and redemption. Yahweh was the Lord of Israel, and Israel was Yahweh's people - this is the shortest formula for the frightening, obliging, and endangered covenant of this people with their Lord. All of this can be found in the texts. Literate Israelites have recorded this. However, these texts by no means were the centre of belief and of public life, they did not play any role in the worship of the Lord, they were not comprised in one book. They did not count as the word of the Lord, with one word: they were not Holy Scripture. Because in the centre of religious life was the cult of offerings, the making of animal, or natural offerings made at the many sanctuaries of the country, later, from 622 on, only at the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. The ancient Israelite religion was a cult religion, not a book religion.

After the catastrophe of 586 and the subsequent Babylonian Exile this gradually changed. There were three major changes. The proportionately few returnees, who returned after the end of the Exile to Palestine around 530, did not form a state, but formed a religious community in and around Jerusalem. They once again took up the cult of offerings at the barely restored Temple in Jerusalem. However - and that is the second change - not all of them returned. Many remained in Babylonia and Egypt and many migrated to the countries surrounding the Mediterranean. The time of dispersion, of the diaspora began. Those who did not live in Jerusalem or at least in Palestine, could not participate in the cult of offerings which was only permitted in Jerusalem. Thus, their interest shifted to the old texts, handed down to them by their forefathers, texts, in which they - as we would say today - found their religious identity. Congregation houses were established, synagogues, in which a totally new form of religious

services emerged - with prayer and praisal surrounding the reading of the old texts, which reported the Lord's deeds in Israel. This kind of worship gradually came to Palestine, this type of service also was introduced there. A third change came about: under the changing conditions also the thoughts and opinions on the Lord changed. The Lord no longer spoke directly through the prophets to his people, the flame of prophecy was extinguished. More and more one saw the Lord's word and will expressed in the old texts which gave accounts of how the Lord had once spoken and acted. In these texts which were supplemented by others, the Lord's authority seemed to be rigidly comprised: the Lord now spoke through the texts and no longer through men. That is meant when one says: the texts became sacred. The original version of what was later to be called the Old Testament emerged. The cult religion was gradually replaced by a book religion. When in 70 A D the later Roman emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple, this did not, as far as the Temple was concerned, cause a gap in everyday religious life. Jewish religion had long before turned into a book religion. It revolved around a sacred book originating from, inspired by, and binding to the Lord, a book with which no other kind of literature was to be compared, let alone could be compared. (The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus describes around 90 A D how things were looked upon then and how great an impact the sacred book, the divine Scripture had gained:

"We do not have ten thousands of books which do not correspond to or even contradict each other, but only 22 books containing the accounts of the entire history. It is justified to believe in these. And five of these originate from Moses, they contain the Commandments and the tradition from Genesis until Moses' death, a time that comprised approximately 3 000 years. In 13 books, the prophets accounted of the events after Moses' death and from Moses' death up to the Persian king Artaxerxes who reigned after Xerxes. The remaining four contain Psalms praising the Lord and basic elements for the life of man. From Artaxerxes until modern times everything was recorded, however, it was not deemed to be worth the belief as the previous since no exact succession of the prophets is known. Actually it is clear how we approach our own writings, since nobody has yet dared to add to already past history or to delete from it or to change it. Since Genesis, all Jews take the Scripture for commanding expressions of the Lord's will. The Jews will remain within them, and will, if necessary, be glad to die for them.")

I have repeatedly used the expressions "Judaism" and "Jewish" and with good reason, since we can only use the expression "Judaism" in an historically precise sense after the Babylonian Exile. Only in the 5th and 4th century B C, and not in the old pre-exile Israel, one can find traits and elements which are characteristic for the Jewish religion. From a scientific historical and religious point

of view it is imperative to limit the expression "Judaism" to the time after the Exile, the time of the Synagogue, the Scripture and the book religion. This should not be mingled with the ancient and different Israel, because, apart from all continuity, a fascinating, impressive new entity had emerged: Judaism with its Scripture. Looking from an historical perspective, biological bonds to the ancient Israel should not be overestimated. The Jews of course are late descendants from the ancient Israelites, just as we Germans are late descendants of removed forefathers from the time of Hermann the Cherusian. However, Judaism and the Jewish religion originated only after the Exile when ancient Israel had fallen.

There are consequences to all this. Just as the post-exile Jews are not identical with ancient Israel, so their religion is not identical with that of their pre-exile forefathers. The Jewish religion follows the Israelite religion. To it we owe the Old Testament. This does not mean that the texts of the Old Testament are of Jewish origin - there actually are some later ones which are but rather that the old pre-Jewish texts became familiar and sacred to Judaism and started to emerge as the central holy divine Book. However, we owe much more to Judaism, for it is evident and could not have been expected otherwise that the old texts which often were closely related to specific events, had to an extent lost their original meaning when they became Jewish. Time had passed, conditions had changed and the old texts were no longer suitable. However, this phenomenon can and may not occur with sacred texts. Their divine origin guarantees an everlasting, continual relevance. Therefore, one has to interpret, explain and update the texts and in many cases even give them a new interpretation for the new time and situation. This does not imply fraud but rather expresses the conviction that Holy Scriptures cannot be anything but relevant. Through them the Lord speaks at all times and to all generations. Thus, in Judaism we find a weighty and impressive process of interpretation and reinterpretation which already commenced in the Old Testament and which continues until today. I want to give two examples. It is written in the 5th chapter of the old prophet Micah: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little (to)(be) among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." With this, the old prophet in the 8th century B C had meant that soon there would appear a king like David. This king would save the state of Judah from the threatening danger of the Assyrians and would bring peace and salvation. The words of the prophet were meant to describe a specific situation at a specific time. Now, centuries later, not only had the future king not arrived, but also did the Assyrians not exist any longer, nobody had to be saved from them. However, the prophet's words had become sacred text, therefore it had to have relevance regardless of its his-

toric context. One considered it as a portending of the future, saw it as a promise for the latter days when the king - the Messiah - would come and conquer the enemies and save the Lord's people. Thus the prophet's word became a vessel of hope for latterday salvation. One assumed that this had been meant from the beginning on and that the Lord wanted to convey this through Micah. A second example: the 2nd and 3rd Book of Moses contain ancient collections of laws which were meant to organize and regulate the life of the people of Israel in Palestine. Many of the circumstances to which the laws pertained no longer existed and vice versa, in Jewish time there existed living conditions which could not be considered by the old laws. This is nearly the same as if we in the 20th century should live and practise law by the Saxon Chronicle instead of the Civil and Criminal Code. However, the ancient laws had become sacred texts, through them the Lord spoke. Thus, one had to make them suitable by exegesis, had to adjust their meaning, had to evolve new out of old under the assumption that the new actually was the original meaning of the sacred texts. Entire schools of Jewish scholars have dealt with this problem, the Rabbis, the Scribes; all of them wrote comprehensive books on exegesis: the Talmud, the Midrashim, the Tosefta. Thus, a rich, Jewish literature of exegesis came into existence. One could also say documents on the historical impact of the Old Testament on Judaism.

When time had matured, Christianity developed from Judaism. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew, as were his Disciples, the oldest Christian communities were Jewish-Christian ones in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Thus, old Christianity accepted the Old Testament, without hesitation as their Scripture, or better: they did not accept it, they simply possessed it like all other Jews. For the Jews, the Jewish Christians were a small, rather obscure sect just as many others. Christians saw themselves as Jews, as the true Jews, as the true Israel, as the community of the latter day Messiah Jesus who had come. However, this was not all. The insight grew that the Christians due to the appearance and the works of Jesus had gained something unprecedented, distinguishing them fundamentally from the Jews. This insight had already developed in Palestine and spread with Christianity over all of the non-Jewish Mediterranean region. Christians started out being Jews, but they did not remain Jews for a long time. A new religion emerged whose oldest comprehensive written documents were later comprised in the New Testament. Jesus and the belief in Jesus was not the only distinction: so all that one could have said: the Christians are Jews who believe in the Messiah Jesus, whereas the Jews are Jews who don't. It was, moreover, the idea of the Lord as a loving father of all of mankind, the idea of salvation of man by the sacrifice of the Lord's Son, the idea of the beginning of the Lord's Kingdom and much more. In other words: Christianity removed itself from Judaism and became a new, self-contained re=

ligion. However, the Christians kept the Old Testament, it was the Scripture, the word of the same God who had brought salvation to mankind through Jesus Christ. Keeping the Old Testament in Christianity necessarily had to lead to a reading of the Book under a Christian perspective, an interpretation and re-interpretation under Christian terms. Just as the Jews had once "made Judaic" the old texts of Israel, now the Christians "christianized" the Jewish Old Testament. They were led by two guiding principles. For one: The Lord, the originator of Scripture, had to have mentioned salvation and redemption by Christ already in the Old Testament, for another: before the coming of Jesus he could only have foreshadowed it. Thus, the Old Testament remained Scripture, however, it received the status of something temporary, incomplete, outdated, something which actually was already surpassed. Only now it became "Old" Testament because now there was a "New" one. Christianity took great pains to interpret the Old Testament accordingly; this already starts in the New Testament and is continued by the Early Fathers. In doing so, one used methods and patterns already used by the Jews in the exegesis of the Scripture, mainly the pattern of prophecy and fulfilment. Not only the old prophetic sayings - for instance Mi 5:1ff - the prophecy of the Messiah's coming to Israel, were now connected with Christ, but also all of the Old Testament was now seen as a single great prophecy of the coming of Jesus and as a foreshadowing of the salvation by him. In these parts, where the text did not allow this, one re-interpreted it accordingly. An example for this could be the saying of the prophet Hosea: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos 11:1). Here, the Lord could not have meant that he had made the people of Israel on their exodus from Egypt his son, since the Lord only possesses one Son, namely Jesus Christ. Here, there was a prophecy of Jesus and one did not hesitate to link the cueword "Egypt" with the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt (Math 2:15). And when we read in the 1st Book of Moses that Abraham had had two sons, Isaac by his wife Sarah, and Ishmael by the handmaid Hagar, and that the line of promise and blessing led over Isaac and not over Ishmael, then we had to realize that this, the keeping of the Law to which Isaac's descendants were committed, had been integrated in the line of promise and blessing. But then, Christ was the end of the Law and the beginning of Justice which indeed counts before the Lord. Christ had freed mankind from the oppressive fetters of the Law. So, in the 4th chapter of St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, he actually stated, that the Christians were the true descendants of the free son Isaac and the inheritors of his promise, while the Jews were the descendants of Ishmael and slaves of the Law. It did not bother him that the Jews thought differently about this, they simply were wrong. He also did not mind that the text of the Old Testament did not at all offer this interpretation, he wasn't even irritated by this because he thought that the Lord must have meant and implied some=

thing else than that which the text suggested at the surface.

(It would be easy to continue with the enumeration of the examples and to go into details. I do not intend to do this here.) We have to draw the conclusions from the historical delineation. There, we are confronted with the astonishing fact that the Old Testament, as Scripture, has experienced a change of religion. In a way, the Old Testament was baptized, it changed from a Jewish to a Christian Holy Book. That again means that whenever we speak of the Old Testament as Holy Scripture of the Jews and Christians we only very superficially mean one and the same book. Seen from the historical point of view, the Old Testament is a book on two or, to be more specific, three levels: a collection of ancient oriental documents of the people of Israel and beginning Judaism, the Holy Scripture of Judaism, and the Holy Scripture of Christianity. When a Jew reads the Torah, he reads something else than a Christian who reads the Five Books of Moses, even though the wording is identical.

If one does not accept this historical perspective, one will not reach a sensible judgement and might fall prey to theological confusions. To my mind, the Rhinian Synod's paper is a document of such a confusion. The imploring sentence "there is a common book for Jews and Christians" can mean nothing else but the signaling of an historic connection. It states that Christianity has evolved historically from Judaism and is historically indebted to it. But it is another religion than Judaism, and its Old Testament is another book than the Hebrew Bible is. In Christianity, the Old Testament actually is "old", i.e. it is preparatory and precedes the new. Therefore, we also have to speak together with old Christianity of a new Chosen People in contrast to the older one, namely the Chosen People which the Lord has chosen and chooses from all people, also from Jews and heathens. Thus, the preaching of the Gospel is basically the same for the Jews and for so-called heathens even if the Gospel as mission may be realized in different ways. It is a consequence of the Rhinian theses that the people of the Old Covenant can reach the Lord and gain salvation without Christ and circumventing him. Christianity has to firmly believe that everywhere and at all times it is valid what is written in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of St John: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes unto the Father but by me!"

In paragraph 12 of his "Glaubenslehre", the great Christian theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher from the beginning of the 19th century postulated the following: "Even though there is a specific historical connection between Christianity and Judaism, as far as its historical being and origin is concerned, its relationship to Judaism is the same as that to heathendom. It may be left open whether distance and closeness are described correctly and

adequately in this sentence and whether it is not just this historical connection which moves Christianity closer to Judaism than to heathendom. This can be seen either way. What is essential is not the stressing and determining of the distance, but rather the nearness, not the nearness of religions to one another, but the closeness of people to the Lord. Jews and heathens are equally close to the Lord. And we who believe in Jesus Christ, should remember the words which he said to his Disciples when two of them had asked to be closer to him in heaven than the others: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).