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One Bible, two Testaments: covenant, ethnicity and new creation¹

ABSTRACT

Sola Scriptura implies *tota Scriptura*, that is both Old and New Testaments. This holds good for the Lutheran and the Reformed branches of the Reformation. The former, however, is inclined towards Marcionism at the expense of the Old Testament, whilst the latter gravitates towards an identification between Old and New lacking the critical character of the Cross. These tendencies were respectively manifested in the German Christians' disposition towards Jewish Christians, and the Dutch Reformed Church's attitude towards the (other) Gentile Christians. In both instances social considerations of race weighed heavier than theological reflections on faith.

ONE REFORMED FAITH, DIFFERENT RACIAL FORMS

During the latter part of the previous century the relation between faith and ethnicity sparked off a rather painful and sometimes even bitter debate within the Reformed churches in South Africa. Because apartheid was considered to be the single solution for the political problems, it was by many conceived to be also the only answer for ethnic and cultural diversity within the church. In order to prevent racial friction, the prevailing policy was the formation of different ethnic churches within the same Reformed tradition.

In the theology of the Reformation the doctrine of **justification** as the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, and the doctrine of **election** as the *cor ecclesiae*, are intimately related. Justification of the wicked as God's covenantal gift, and the covenant(s)² of promise as expression of God's gracious unmerited election, are like *faith* and *grace*, correlating concepts. Both underscore our total dependency on God's grace *extra nos* in Christ the *Righteous and Beloved (Elect)*.

It is a pity that in combating the policy of apartheid within the churches, these twin doctrines did not play a major part.³ Consequently it comes as no surprise that opposition against this policy

1 Paper read at the 4th Conference of the International Reformed Theological Institute, Princeton 2001 on *Faith and Ethnicity*.

2 Vide T E McComiskey, *The covenants of promise. A theology of the Old Testament covenants*, Grand Rapids 1985.

3 J Punt, *Paul and freedom: implications for hermeneutics and theology*, University of Stellenbosch, unpublished dissertation, 1999, vii, note 17, makes mention of the scant attention given to the Pauline letters in the well-known *Kairos Document* (1986). In my article 'Kerklike eenheid en natuurlike verskeidenheid', in J Kinghorn (ed), *Die NG Kerk en apartheid*, Johannesburg 1986, 194-210, I tried to relate the rejection of separate church formations for different ethnic groups to the doctrine of justification. Cf M E Brinkman, *Justification in ecumenical dialogue. Central aspects of Christian soteriology in debate*, Utrecht 1996, 44-47, who refers to L R L Ntoane, *A cry for life. An interpretation of "Calvinism" and Calvin*, Kampen 1983, 186/188, and J de Cruchy, *Liberating Reformed theology. A South African contribution to an ecumenical debate*, Grand Rapids/Cape Town 1991, 156-166.

was often perceived as motivated by nothing but a political agenda, lacking a sound theological foundation. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of justification by faith has sometimes been blamed as the real villain of the piece because it fostered the individualistic “introspective conscience of the West” (Krister Stendahl)⁴ coupled with scant social concern. Unfortunately in some instances this critique has led to a neglect of the theological and soteriological character of this doctrine in favour of a sociological framework.⁵ On the other hand it has focussed our attention on the covenantal⁶ context of the doctrine of justification that is of paramount importance for the purpose of this paper.

ROMANTICISM VERSUS REFORMATION

In trying to justify the institution of different ethnic church formations within the “Dutch Reformed family”, the clear distinction between the church as *organism* and as *institute*, which is crucial in the ecclesiology of Kuyper, was taken for granted. Although Kuyper is trying to retain a bond between the two, the institute tends to become something merely external, whilst the soul of the church resides in the organism as a spiritual, living reality. This conviction is reflected in Kuyper’s view that the *notae* of the church (Word and sacraments) are not truly means of grace, since the latter is the fruit of the immediate work of the Holy Spirit.⁷ On the other hand the *attributa* of the church (unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity) belong to the church as an organism. According to Kuyper, failing to recognise this was the big blunder of Roman Catholicism.⁸ They did not perceive that the institute is something “additional” that does not belong to the very being (*esse*) of the church, but is meant (merely) for her well being (*bene esse*).⁹

If Kuyper did not draw the inference himself, his South African admirers were quick to jump to the conclusion that institutional unity amongst the various ethnic configurations was uncalled for and even damaging to the spiritual unity of the church. The institutional form after all was simply the result of human preference and practical expedience. This predilection for the organism at the expense of the institute is reminiscent of a new trend in Roman Catholic ecclesiology towards the latter part of the 19th century as represented by the *Katholische Tübinger Schule* (J A Möhler) that was strongly influenced by German Idealism (Schelling) and Romanticism.¹⁰ The leaning was not towards the external but the internal, not law but life, not organisation but

4 James D G Dunn & Alan M Suggate, *The justice of God. A fresh look at the old doctrine of justification by faith*, Carlisle UK, 1993, 14. Jeremia Punt, *Paul and Freedom*, 107.

5 J Punt, *Paul and Freedom*, 366. Cf A B du Toit, The centrality of grace in the theology of Paul, in *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif* 37 (4) 1996, 598.

6 For the importance of the covenant in “late Judaism” see N T Wright, *The New Testament and the people of God*, (second impression with corrections) London, 1992, 260-262. He also submits: “Though it is unfashionable to use covenantal categories in interpreting Paul, I believe, as is already clear in this book, that they are actually central; and, moreover, they are habitually expressed in forensic language, i e using the root dik-” (his italics). *The climax of the covenant. Christ and the law in Pauline theology*, Minneapolis, 1992, 203.

7 A Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie II*, Kampen, 1932(2), 660: “De in bediening van Woord en Sacramenten optredende kerken zijn alzoo niet de van God verordende instrumenten, waardoor aan den zondaar het innerlijke wezen der zaligheid toekomt.”

8 A Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek (locus de ecclesia)*, Kampen, s a, (2), 81, 101.

9 Ibid, 111.

10 W Maurer, Der Organismusgedanke bei Schelling und in der Theologie der Katholischen Tübinger Schule, in *Kerygma und Dogma* 8 (1962), 202-216.

organism, not *Gesellschaft* but *Gemeinschaft*. Consequently it comes as no surprise that the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, namely the doctrine of the forensic justification proclaimed to the wicked, finds no favour with Abraham Kuyper.¹¹ The *extra nos* which is an indispensable constituent of this doctrine, militates against this entire frame of mind with its preference for the living organism and its propensity towards impersonal biological metaphors.¹² In such a paradigm the institute indeed tends to become a lifeless legalistic form, and Word and sacraments (as visible Word) lose their character as personal promises. The “life” of the church tends to replace the faith of the church. The most subtle form of liberal humanism namely of “regenerated” humanity, supplants the humility of a church crouching beneath the cross.

As long as the concept “nation” merely denotes “that part of the state that does not know its own mind” (Hegel) it is a fairly innocuous notion. However, when under influence of Romanticism an intimate pact is concluded between people, history, language, blood and native soil, the idolatrous character of this close covenant becomes clear. When the Christian faith becomes the property of the people, the consequences are catastrophic. The community of faith becomes the apex of the cultural and ethnic community and has to foster the innate longing for communion that unifies the people. This *communio* has nothing to do with the *communio sanctorum* but is a blending of Herder and Luther, Romanticism and Reformation, at the expense of the latter. In such a spiritual climate confessional differences become unimportant as long as the “faith” of the people cooperates in creating a “Nationalgeist” (Lagarde) and entails no threat to national (or racial) identity. The faith of the church has no deeper function but to perform a cultural and political purpose. This is again a real danger in the “new” South Africa when “tolerance” tends to become the prime, if not only virtue. A firm commitment to one’s faith may be seen as endangering the unity of our “rainbow” nation.

SOLA SCRIPTURA INVOLVES TOTA SCRIPTURA

Of incisive significance as far as the question of faith and ethnicity is concerned, is the fundamental issue of the relationship between the people of Israel and the Gentile peoples. Especially within the Reformed tradition the concept of “covenant” has always been of pivotal importance. The mere fact that the Christian Bible is divided into two “Testaments” (respectively: “covenants”) is proof enough that this emphasis has a strong biblical basis. Since the Second World War the relation between the two Testaments as well as the concomitant issue of the bond between Church and Israel, has been a theological focal point.¹³

11 W H Velema, *De leer van de Heilige Geest bij Abraham Kuyper*, 's-Gravenhage, 1957, 239.

12 Cf H Berkhof, *De katholiciteit der kerk*, Nijkerk, 1962, ch 3, with regard to the concept “organism” in theology.

13 See for instance the bibliography in D L Baker, *Two Testaments, one Bible. A study of some modern solutions to the theological problem of the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments*, Leicester, 1976; Christina Grenholm, *The Old Testament, Christianity and Pluralism*, Tübingen, 1996; J D G Dunn, *The Partings of the ways. Between Christianity and Judaism and their significance for the character of Christianity*, London, 1996 (second impression); W A Van Gemeren, G L Bahnsen, W C Kaiser jr, W G Strickland & D J Moo, *The Law, the Gospel, and the modern Christian. Five views*, Grand Rapids, 1993; W S Barker & W R Godfrey (ed), *Theonomy. A Reformed Critique*, Grand Rapids, 1990; *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie Band 4*, “Gesetz” als Thema Biblischer Theologie, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1989; John S Feinberg (ed), *Continuity and Discontinuity. Perspectives on the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments (Essays in honor of S Lewis Johnson, jr)*, Illinois, 1988; G F Hawthorne & O Betz (ed), *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament. Essays in honor of E Earle Ellis*, Grand

Richard Longenecker distinguishes a Marcionite, Alexandrian and Antiochean approach to this problem.¹⁴ While Marcion rejected the God of the Old Testament, together with everything associated with the Jewish law including the Jerusalem apostles outright, the Alexandrian and Antiochean Fathers are united in maintaining the continuity between the two Testaments. However, whereas “the Alexandrians tended to understand continuity in terms of identity ... the Antiocheans saw it in terms of development ...”¹⁵

Since *sola Scriptura* most certainly implies *tota Scriptura* there can be no doubt that the Reformers were unanimous in rejecting the Marcion option. Nevertheless Longenecker sees the difference in emphasis between the Antiochean and the Alexandrian Fathers also reflected in Luther and Calvin respectively. Luther held the Old Testament in high esteem, but as is obvious from his *Preface to the Old Testament* (1523), not the continuity but the discontinuity between the two Testaments is predominant from his perspective. Conversely, Calvin in his *Institutes* stresses the similarity much more than the differences. He claims that the covenants in the Old and the New Testament are one in substance and consequently one and the same, while the differences are due to the manner of *dispensation*.¹⁶ What is implicit in the Old, becomes explicit in the New.

In (Lutheran) Germany and (Reformed) South Africa the dangers involved in both approaches became apparent. The first is tilted towards Marcionism¹⁷; the second has a leaning towards legalism. The former tends towards separating Old and New Testament at the expense of the

Rapids, Tübingen, 1987; L Sabourin, *The Bible and Christ. The unity of the two testaments*, New York, 1980; F C Fensham, 'The covenant as giving expression to the relationship between Old and New Testament', in *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971), 82-94; A H van Zyl, 'The relation between the Old and New Testaments', in *Hermeneutica*, Pretoria, 1970, 9-22; P A Verhoef, 'The relationship between the Old and the New Testaments', in J B Payne (ed), *New perspectives on the Old Testament*, London, 1970, 280-303; I H Eybers, *Hermeneutiese beginsels vir die Ou Testament in die lig van die verhouding Ou Testament – Nuwe Testament*, Communications of the University of South Africa A 28, Pretoria, 1963.

14 Richard N Longenecker, 'Three ways of understanding relations between the Testaments: historically and today', in Gerald F Hawthorne & Otto Betz (eds), *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament. Essays in honor of E Earle Ellis*, Grand Rapids, 1987, 22-32.

15 *Ibid.*, 28.

16 *Inst* 2, 2, 1; D L Baker, *Two Testaments, one Bible*, 52. For an in-depth discussion of Calvin's attitude towards the law see I John Hesselink, *Calvin's concept of the law*, Allison Park, 1992. For the different attitudes of (the older) Luther and Calvin towards the Jews, see D E Holwerda, *Jesus & Israel. One Covenant or Two?*, Grand Rapids, 1995, 2f.

17 D L Baker, *Two Testaments, one Bible*, (79-85) has described the rise of “neo-Marcionism” in the period between the two World Wars in which the two-volume work of Friedrich Delitzsch (*Die grosse Täuschung*, 1920-21) and the book by Adolf von Harnack on Marcion (*Das Evangelium von fremden Gott*, 1921), played a major role. Although their intention was not political, they advocated that the Old Testament should be excluded from the Christian Bible. Urged on by political motivation, the Nazis tried to substitute the Old Testament with Nordic and Aryan literature and intimated that had he lived, Luther would have done the same. Baker detects “implicit Marcionism” in the manner in which after the war the Old Testament was relegated to Judaism as a religion.

More or less the opposite tendency obtains within the British-Israel movement with its propensity towards the Old Testament, which has many disciples within the so-called “white theology” in South Africa. To a large extent the Reformed tradition as such, is more inclined to read the New Testament in the light of the Old than *vice versa*. The Old is in principle familiar and the New the unknown. In the New Testament after all, the Old Testament is never called the “Old”, but is referred to as (Holy) Scripture(s), that is used to explain the meaning of Christ. (See for instance H F Kohlbrugge, *Waartoe het Oude Testament?*, Kampen, 1988.)

former; the latter gravitates towards an identification lacking the critical character of the Cross.¹⁸ In Germany the Marcionite tendency was manifested when German Christians refused communion with Jewish Christians. The South African brand of Calvinism on the other hand was inclined to identify with ethnic Israel, and like the Jewish Christians in the time of the New Testament, rejected *koinonia* with the (other) Gentile Christians. In both instances social considerations of race and ethnicity weighed heavier than theological reflections on faith.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AS PARADIGM

In a sad and painful irony of history, Herder saw in Israel (!), as a people, a paradigm to give new dignity to the concept “nation” (“Volk”). The relation between “church” and “people” in the Old Testament should serve as an example for every nation, but only after the Old Testament *am* has been filled with the alien content of Romanticism. At a later stage in history it became clear that this ploy implied nothing less than a rejection of the Old Testament and its Messiah.

It comes as no surprise that within the Reformed tradition, with its love for the Old Testament, the “volkskerk” have many adherents. Notwithstanding the strong historical bond between the Dutch people and the Reformed faith, the rather sober notion of the “natie”, however, lacks the lustre and glory that characterises the German “Volk”.¹⁹ In the Netherlands the best exponents of this point of view have always rejected the “volkskerk” as the church of the masses in favour of a “Christ-confessing church for the nation”.²⁰ The basic supposition was again that Israel as a people should function as a paradigm for the gentile nations in the New Testament. In this connection the theological legitimacy of infant baptism, as founded on the Old Testament, played an important role. This does not necessarily imply that the church coincides with the nation, because according to Hoedemaker “the people” is not constituted by the blood in their veins, but rather the water in the baptistry.²¹ Even in the Old Testament the ethnic Israel is not as a matter of course identified with “the people of God”.²² According to Koopmans, Israel is not merely a people in an ethnological sense, but as **God’s** people, they are an *eschatological* people.²³ Otherwise God’s covenant would have been nothing more than a merely “natural” phenomenon.

The unique position of Israel, however, is compromised when some of the proponents of the “volkskerk” (Kromsigt for instance)²⁴ propose that also in the New Testament God concludes his

18 Well-known is the remark made by A A van Ruler (*Die christliche Kirche und das Alte Testament*, Munich, 1955) that the New Testament is an interpretative glossary of the Old Testament. Vide L Sabourin, *The Bible and Christ*, 46.

19 Whilst in the Netherlands the distinction between “nation” as a political, and “people” (“volk”) as a cultural concept is not clear, in Germany the difference between “people” (“Volk”) as a cultural, and “race” as a biological category, became blurred. By and large not German Romanticism, but the more moderate idea of the Greek *polis*, provides the background for understanding the European usage of the concept “nation”. In this regard the overarching European *corpus christianum* also played a restraining and tempering role.

20 Cf P F Theron, *Natuur en genade, kerk en volk*, in C J Wethmar & C J A Vos, *'n Woord op sy tyd. 'n Teologiese feesbundel aangebied aan prof Johan Heyns ter herdenking van sy sestigste verjaarsdag*, Pretoria, 1988, 164-166.

21 T L Haitjema, *Onze volkskerk en de christelike organisaties*, in *Kerk en Theologie* 55 (1955), 149.

22 J C Hoekendijk, *Kerk en volk in de Duitse Zendingwetenschap*, Amsterdam, 1948, 234ff.

23 H J Langman, *Kuyper en de volkskerk, een dogmatisch-ecclesiologische studie*, Kampen, 1950, 261. Berkouwer concurs with Koopmans that it is untenable to use infant baptism as an argument to conclude that the covenant is a “natural” matter. G C Berkouwer, *Karl Barth en de kinderdoop*, Kampen, 1947, 149.

24 H J Langman, *Kuyper en de volkskerk*, 210.

covenant with the gentile peoples on a national basis. This opinion does not seriously take into account that according to the New Testament, Israel as God's covenant people is the "natural branches" whilst the gentiles are called a wild olive shoot that "contrary to nature" (Rom 11:24) has "been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap of the olive root" (Rom 11:17). Even in the New Testament Israel still maintains her *dignitas primogeniturae* (Calvin). The great importance bestowed on "nation" in a secular sense, quite obviously lacks any biblical basis. Often an appeal was made to the words *panta ta ethne* in "the great commission" (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47), but these words are used as a *terminus technicus* for the entire human race outside Israel.²⁵ As a matter of fact it is impossible to establish a direct connection between the concept *éthnos* in the New Testament and what is nowadays known as a nation ("volk"). In the words of N A Dahl, "Jewish nationality is most of all religious, Greek nationality is linguistic and cultural, and Roman is political. For this reason it was possible to be a Jew by descent and religion, a Greek by language, culture and residence, and a Roman by virtue of citizenship."²⁶

THE "NEW PERSPECTIVE" ON PAUL

In recent decades the debate centering around the so-called "new perspective" on Paul²⁷ is of prime importance. It is argued that Paul is not opposing the law as a means of personal justification as understood by Protestant scholars. Neither in the Old Testament, nor in Second Temple Judaism, was the law considered to be a way of salvation but, as "covenantal nomism" (Sanders), it was not the root but the fruit of God's gracious covenant.²⁸ The proponents of the "new perspective" are convinced that Paul's apparent ambiguous attitude towards the law can only be solved when one takes into account that the precepts of the law fulfilled a social function as identity and boundary markers which maintained the set-apartness (apartheid, if you like) of Israel from the nations.²⁹ According to James Dunn that applies predominantly to ritual laws like circumcision, sabbath and food laws, but it also holds true for the covenantal law in its totality.³⁰ Membership of the covenant people apart from the law was inconceivable.³¹ Paul did not renounce the law *per se* but the

25 J C Hoekendijk, *Kerk en volk*, 229. Barth indicates the impossibility of *autous* to refer to *ta ethne* and pokes fun at the way in which this text was used in German missiology. K Barth, *Auslegung von Matthäus* 28, 16-20, Basel (Basler Missionsbuchhandlung) 1945, 15.

26 N A Dahl, Nations in the New Testament, in M E Glasswell & E W Fasholé-Luke (eds), *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the world. Essays in honour of Harry Sawyer*, London, 1974, 61.

27 J D G Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the law*, London, 1990, ch 7. In this regard the publications of E P Sanders played a major role, for instance *Paul, the law, and the Jewish people*, Minneapolis, 1983. For a survey and critical discussion of the "new perspective", see Colin G Kruse, *Paul, the law and justification*, Leicester, 1996. Two recent dissertations that deal with this shift in paradigm with regard to understanding Paul, are J Punt, *Paul and freedom*, and Kent L Yinger, *Paul, Judaism and judgement according to deeds*, Cambridge, 1999. For a review of the latter see H J de Bie, in *Theologia Reformata* 43 (3) 2000, 183f.

28 J D G Dunn & A M Suggate, *The justice of God*, 20.

29 J D G Dunn & A M Suggate, *The justice of God*, 22f.

30 Dunn quotes Aristéas (139, 142): "(Moses) fenced us round with impregnable ramparts and walls of iron, that we might not mingle at all with any of the other nations, but remain pure in soul ... he hedged us round on all sides by rules of purity, affecting alike what we eat, or drink, or touch, or hear, or see."

31 219. Cf also James D G Dunn, *The parting of the ways. Between Christianity and Judaism and their significance for the character of Christianity*, London, 1996 (second impression) in which he deals with "the four pillars" of Second Temple Judaism, that is monotheism, election, covenant focussed in Torah and land focussed in temple.

conviction that the Jews as a race are God's covenant people and thereby claiming the law and the covenant as their own³² excluding the gentiles.³³ Paul is rejecting the "fleshliness" and boasting involved in claiming that acceptability to God depends "on their physical descent from Abraham (and) their national identity as Jews".³⁴

It is obvious that this "new perspective" presents a valuable contribution to the debate on faith and ethnicity. Also N T Wright, who is critical of Dunn, claims that "the idea of justification properly belongs not in an individualistic soteriology but in the context of God's affirmation that this or that person is a member of his covenant people".³⁵ At the same time there is a strong inclination by some supporters of the "new perspective" to overstate the contrast between Luther (respectively: the Reformation) and Paul. Snodgrass has rightly pointed out that the difference between confidence placed in works that are identity markers, and works that are performed to make oneself acceptable to God, is very slim indeed.³⁶ Personally I am convinced that the Reformers were trying to liberate us from ourselves including the "introspective conscience of the West", and anchoring our existence *extra nos* in Christ. This entails crucifying our vaunting "flesh" in all its forms (cf Phil 3:1-10) whether it be our works, our ethnicity or for that matter, our "faith".³⁷

COVENANT, CROSS AND NEW CREATION

'Meaningless! Meaningless! ... Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless,' exclaims the Teacher of Ecclesiastes (1:2) at the beginning of this most peculiar book in the Bible. Under the heading "The end of the Law",³⁸ Noordmans maintains that in this book that is presumably one of the latest of the Old Testament, the latter is all but dead and we can be grateful that the New is coming. The Old Testament has grown old and its disappearance is near (Heb 8:13). Reading this book he is reminded of Peter walking on the water. It sounds as if the saints of the Old Testament are extending their hands to Christ crying: *Lord save us, we are dying!*

There must have been something in Paul that appealed to Marcion. Noordmans considers it quite conceivable that Paul could have such a successor who rejected the Old Testament³⁹ and accordingly calls him the evil shadow of this favourite apostle of Protestantism.⁴⁰ He is also

32 J D G Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the law*, 190, 202.

33 James D G Dunn, "Righteousness from the law" and "righteousness from faith": Paul's interpretation of Scripture in Romans 10:1-10, in G F Hawthorne & O Betz (ed), *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament*, 225.

34 J D G Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the law*, 199. For the meaning of the expression "works of the law" Dunn refers to the use of these words by the Qumran people to distinguish them from other Jews. J D G Dunn & A M Suggate, *The justice of God*, 26. For a fuller discussion see J D G Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the law*, 219ff; 238ff.

35 N T Wright, *The climax of the covenant*, 203.

36 J Punt, *Paul and freedom*, 118, note 85. Dunn himself writes that Paul's "treatment of Abraham in Romans 4:1ff. is wholly determined by Paul's attempt to counter the standard Jewish view that Abraham was justified by his faithfulness, that is, as demonstrated by his obedience in the matter of circumcision and the offering of Isaac, his law-keeping ... " J D G Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the law*, 239.

37 *In fides accepta niti – hoc est fornicari*. M Luther quoted by O Hof, "Luther's Unterscheidung zwischen dem Glauben und der Reflexion auf den Glauben, in *Kerygma und Dogma*, 1972, 303.

38 Vide *Verzamelde Werken (VW)* 8, 53-55.

39 Psychologie en evangelie, in *VW* 2, Kampen, 1979, 102.

40 O Noordmans, Het probleem van de continuïteit binnen de dialectische theologie, in *VW* 3, Kampen, 1981, 657.

prepared to pose a greater distance between Paul and the other apostles than is customary within Reformed circles. Given the Trinitarian structure of the Bible (OT: the Father; Gospels: the Son; Acts and the Letters: the Holy Spirit⁴¹) one can sustain that in a sense, Paul as apostle of the Holy Spirit replaces the apostles of what is nowadays known as the “Jewish Jesus”. Noordmans perceives a movement in Acts that can be described as “Paul comes and Peter goes”.⁴² This “Gospel of Pentecost” starts with Peter in Jerusalem amongst the Jews, and ends with Paul in Rome amidst the Gentiles.⁴³

At the same time Noordmans would *con amore* agree with Dunn that Paul would have been horrified at Marcion’s attitude towards the Old Testament.⁴⁴ He emphatically denies that Paul was a Jewish renegade.⁴⁵ If he were, he would have swept Moses and the law away, but for Paul the Gospel is inconceivable without the law. The fundamental Biblical distinction between Old and New, cannot neatly be divided between Old and New Testament.⁴⁶ The New is not absent from the Old Testament neither the Old from the New. *Testamentum Novum in Vetere latet, et Vetus in Novo patet*⁴⁷ (Augustine).

The history that transpired between God and Israel is of supreme importance for the entire creation. Repeatedly we find in the Old Testament a transition from old to new and time and again it becomes clear that whoever comes into contact with God through his divine institutions, falls into sin.⁴⁸ Consequently he describes the Old Testament as the “book of the fall”.⁴⁹ If we find that unfair, he refers us to the sermon of Stephen (Acts 7).⁵⁰ The law had the same effect on Israel as the commandment “Do not covet” had on Adam and Eve (Rom 7:7-12).⁵¹ God has chosen Israel as representative of the world and given her the law in order that the trespass might increase (Rom 5:20).⁵² Whilst in the Paradise narrative the story of the Fall retains much of a mythical character, in Romans 7 the Fall is transferred into the bright daylight of historical reality as it is manifested in the history of Israel. The good and holy law of God becomes in sinful human hands, a demonic historical power that propels humanity forward in its fall.⁵³ The law was added in order to lure sin that was dead and hidden in our being, out into the open. The history of the Torah can be characterised as the history of the fall.

41 VW 2, 447.

42 Part IV of “Gestalte en Gees”: “Paulus komt en Petrus gaat”, in *Hervormde overpeinzigen*, in VW 8, 1980, 429ff. One is also reminded of the words of the old Simeon in Lk 2:29. A van de Beek maintains that these words should not be read in an individualistic way. They refer in the first place to Israel whose task has been completed and can now be dismissed. *Gespannen Liefde. De relatie van God en de mens*, Kampen, 2000, 63f. Cf also on the relation between Peter and Paul VW 8, 403-405.

43 VW 8, 356.

44 J D G Dunn, *The living Word*, London, 1987, 55.

45 VW 8, 392; also VW 2, 101.

46 Ebeling has warned against the danger of confusing the Biblical antithesis between New and Old with the conventional contrast between “young and old” or even “modern and old-fashioned”. G Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens* 111, Tübingen, 1979, 139. For the category of the New see also E Jüngel, *Theological Essays II*, Edinburgh, 1995, ch 3: “The emergence of the New”, and C B Hoch, Jr, *All things new, The significance of Newness for Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids, 1995.

47 The New Testament is hidden in the Old. The Old Testament is revealed in the New. VW 2, 259f.

48 VW 2, 19f.

49 VW 2, 260. See also 246.

50 VW 2, 21.

51 N T Wright, *The climax of the covenant*, 197.

52 VW 8, 391-393.

53 VW 2, 246.

But God works even in the bad for the good (Rom 8:28). The history of the Fall is at the same time the account of the incarnation, that is God's following us down into the deep.⁵⁴ Christ could not have come into an innocent world. Our anxiety (Kierkegaard) that seduces us to seek our security and safety outside our Saviour but causes our fall,⁵⁵ must be socialised to disobedience and sin.⁵⁶ Where sin increased, grace increased the more (Rom 5:20). The world is falling from the hands of the Creator Father into the arms of the Redeemer Son.

"Christ on the cross is thus the goal of Torah."⁵⁷ The cross on Calvary can be called the *(anti)climax of the Jewish covenant*. Out of the darkness of God's wrath and judgement where nobody is good but God,⁵⁸ a new creation is born in a circle of light around the cross, with the murderer and Mary Magdalene emerging as the new Adam and Eve.⁵⁹

That was the awesome vicarious task given to Israel – a task so formidable that God in Christ, the Messiah of Israel, had to take it over.⁶⁰ "That which, in the scheme of Deuteronomy, Israel needed if she incurred the curse of the law, is provided in Christ: the pattern of exile and restoration is acted out in his death and resurrection. He *is* Israel, going down to death under the curse of the law, and going through that curse to the new covenant life beyond."⁶¹ On Calvary the Fall is completed.⁶² *Tetelesthai: It is finished!* (Jn 19:30). The mission of the Son is fulfilled. He can return to the Father in order that the Holy Spirit may come. "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4). The death of Christ is the terminus (*telos*, fulfilment) and as such also the termination of the Old Testament.⁶³ The mission to the gentiles can commence.

NOT RACE BUT GRACE

Although the Old Testament has **already** come to an end on the cross, it has not **as yet** vanished from view in the New Testament. We are still living in the old falling world, as testified by every newspaper. Calvin reproves Servetus for pretending that there is no distinction between Christ and us, as if Paul was incorrect in saying that we are saved in hope.⁶⁴ Luther would say: *jam factam ... nondum revelatum* (already happened, not yet revealed).⁶⁵ Calvin agrees: In this life we are engaged in a perpetual warfare under the cross (*in mundo peregrinatur, militet sub perpetua cruce*).⁶⁶ Hebrews 8:13 tells us that the Old is "obsolete and ageing" and its disappearance is **near**, but that does not alter the fact that it is still here. Living in between the disappearing of the Old and the appearing of the New, the church is, according to Noordmans, an anachronism in this world: too

54 VW 2, 259. These ideas are worked out more fully in his masterly written essay *Psychology and Gospel* that deals with Rom 7. VW 2, 98-118.

55 VW 2, 328.

56 VW 2, 107.

57 N T Wright, *The climax of the covenant*, 243.

58 VW 2, 300.

59 VW 2, 257.

60 VW 8, 392.

61 N T Wright, *The climax of the covenant*, 152.

62 VW 2, 113.

63 VW 2, 24.

64 *Inst* 2, 9, 3.

65 See J T Bakker, *Eschatologische prediking bij Luther*, Kampen, 1964, 51.

66 Quoted (*De scandalis*) by T F Torrance, *Kingdom and church – a study in the theology of the Reformation*, Edinburgh, 1956, 123.

early for heaven and too late for the earth.⁶⁷ What applies to the individual also is true of the church: *simul justus et peccator*. Outside of Christ our sin separates us; in Christ our sin unites us.

The proximity of the disappearance of the Old dispensation, is proportional to the imminence of the appearance of the New (Mk 1:15). It is the coming of the New that causes the crisis (judgement) of the Old. As the resurrection is concealed in Christ's broken flesh on the cross, the eschatological New Covenant of Jeremiah 31-34 which is extensively quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12, when the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Is 11:9), is hidden in the church that, like Paul, knows only in part (1 Cor 13:12). Together with the Old Testament, also the church will disappear.⁶⁸ Although like all flesh also the ephemeral glory of the letter of the law (2 Cor 3)⁶⁹ is like the fading flowers of the field (Ps 103:15) we cannot do without "Moses and the prophets" to be able to even talk about the New that has already appeared in Christ. Sin consists in putting one's trust in this fleeting reality instead of the Author of this reality. Noordmans concedes that in the mean time a morality that orders our life and is to a large extent determined by our culture, is indispensable.⁷⁰ An immoral life would "grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph 2:29). But morality as such won't save us. The Son of God went to the country of moralism like the prodigal son went to the far country of immorality. The former is just as far from the Father as is evidenced by Christ's cry on the cross.⁷¹

If "Moses and the prophets" can serve as a summary of the Old Testament, Noordmans is willing to call "Jesus and Paul" (respectively the Holy Spirit) the content of the New. The name "Jesus" (like "Christ") is a description of his office of suffering as Servant of the Father. In that sense Jesus was no Jew but the eschatological Adam. One can almost say that like his Saviour, Paul's entire existence is defined in his office as apostle of the Holy Spirit. Jesus (Christ) and Saul (Paul) are "nameless" and "stateless" in this world.⁷² Paul is known as the apostle of the Gentiles, but perhaps it would be better to call him the apostle of all people namely Jews and Gentiles,⁷³ because Christ has destroyed the "barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh (on the cross) the law with its commandments and regulations" (Eph 3:14f).

Beside the more moderate apostles of Jesus, Noordmans describes Paul and Stephen as the great radicals of the New Testament. They present the line running from Jerusalem through Damascus and Antioch towards the ends of the earth. This is a movement away from the Jewish temple and Jewish exclusiveness towards the Samaritans and the Gentiles.⁷⁴ In Paul's Letter to the Romans, the ethnic tension between Jew and Gentile⁷⁵ involuntarily becomes the theological contrast between Old and New Testament, law and faith, Adam and Christ, flesh and Spirit.⁷⁶ Neither the Old Testament, nor the incarnation can directly be prolonged into the New. Between

67 VW 2, 29.

68 VW 2, 26: "Wanneer het Oude Testament verdwijnt, verdwijnt ook de kerk. Nu is het nog maar nabij de verdwijning."

69 Cf article by O Hofius, *Gesetz und Evangelium nach 2. Korinther 3*, in "*Gesetz als Thema Biblischer Theologie, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* (4) 1989. He shows how Paul contrasts his own ministry of the Spirit, with Moses' ministry of the letter.

70 See his article *Moraal en evangelie*, in VW 8, 34-43.

71 VW 8, 42.

72 VW 8, 383f.

73 VW 8, 391.

74 VW 8, 380.

75 Cf J C Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul's letter to the Romans. Changing self-definitions in earliest Roman Christianity*, Valley Forge, 1993.

76 VW 2, 100.

Easter and Pentecost is a gaping abyss that cannot be crossed from our side.⁷⁷ In Romans 7 he describes the experience of every Israelite, every Christian, every human being.⁷⁸ All must take part in the procession to the cross. Henceforth we know neither Christ nor any other human being after the flesh (2 Cor 5:16). After all, *in Christ* there is “a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:17).

In Ephesians the “mystery of Christ” (3:4) is “that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together in one body, and share together in the promise in Christ”. His exclusive **promise** to Israel: *I shall be your God and you shall be my people*,⁷⁹ includes God’s inclusive **purpose** for the nations in Christ. This is the same mystery and wisdom of God’s counsel that Paul extols at the end of Romans 11.⁸⁰ In the verse (v 32) immediately preceding this famous doxology, Paul declares: “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.” After all, God has no favourites. “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile ...” (Rom 10:12).

Accordingly it is not necessary for the Gentile Christians to become Jews in order to be acceptable to God. This is the point Paul is driving forcefully home in the letter to the Galatians. But neither is there any reason for anti-Semitism and boasting among the Gentile believers. This is the point Paul is arguing in Romans 11.⁸¹ Neither is it necessary or even desirable that within the church comprising Jew and Gentiles there should be uniformity in which cultural differences should be eliminated as is clear from the latter part of the letter to the Romans. What is precluded is boasting in any form (judging⁸² for instance) that would endanger the unity within the one body of Christ.

In the new creation (Gal 6:15) circumcision as such (Gal 5:6) and mere natural descent like the son of Hagar (Gal 4:23) or Esau (Rom 9:10), count for nothing. Otherwise there would have been cause for boasting in something else than the cross of Christ “through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). The only thing that is of decisive significance is the unfailing promise of God that is “Yes” in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). “The promise had to be by faith, so that it could be according to grace: otherwise there would be some who would inherit not by grace but as of right, by race.”⁸³

When Noordmans advocates the idea of a “volkskerk”, he deliberately avoids the dimension of almost mythical fascination that is typical of the “Volk” within Romanticism and gives to it the connotation of the rabble, the riff-raff, the *hoi polloi*, the *am ha-arets* (Afrikaans and Dutch: “Jan Rap en sy maat”) that corresponds with the doctrine of justification of the ungodly. The church is a community of people that comprises the destitute, the social misfit and deformed, the blind and the beggars, the sinners and the publicans. After all (1 Cor 1:27-29), “God chose the foolish things

77 VW 2, 21, 24; VW 8, 356.

78 VW 8, 392.

79 O Palmer Robertson calls this promise “the central unifying theme of the covenant, (that) underscores the role of oneness as the essence of the goal of the covenant”. Quoted by J H Walton, *Covenant. God’s purpose, God’s plan*, Grand Rapids, 1994, 25.

80 Both Noordmans and Wright have indicated the close connection between Rom 7 and 11.

81 N T Wright, *The climax of the covenant*, 195.

82 Cf W A Meeks, Judgement and the brother: Romans 14:1-15:13, in G F Hawthorne & O Betz (eds), *Tradition and interpretation in the New Testament*, 290-300. He indicates how the later part of the Letter to the Romans hangs together with the earlier parts.

83 N T Wright, *The climax of the covenant*, 168. Again with regard to Rom 9: 6-13: “What counts, exactly as in Romans 3.21-4:25 or Galatians 3-4, is grace not race”, 238.

of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, **so that no one may boast before him.**”

This is the real reason why people find the doctrine of election offensive. The election proclaims that God is not selective. God is impartial and has no racial or moral favourites.⁸⁴ His choice implies that He is not choosy at all. He chooses not like selectors the cream for the team, but only those who are without any merit. The fastidious Pharisee and the eldest son of the parable find that scandalous. It is the same scandal as the repulsive cross. His people are not the pick of the bunch, because the election proclaims that God is not picky at all. His choice is motivated merely by our misery. What is decisive is not race but grace (Wright); not the nation, but the incarnation (Noordmans).

In other words, in Christ is room for all. But for that very reason there is no room for sinful pride. Therefore Paul concludes his doxology at the end of Romans 11 with the words: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” *Soli Deo Gloria.*

84 See the dissertation by J M Bassler, *Divine Impartiality. Paul and a theological axiom*, Yale University, 1982.