



**„...THAT JAPHET DWELL IN THE TENTS OF SHEM" GEN 9:27
THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH AND THE MYSTERY OF ISRAEL IN LEO BAECK
AND GEORG EICHHOLZ**

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Abstract:

This study examines the theological interplay between Judaism and Christianity as reflected in the works of Leo Baeck and Georg Eichholz, focusing on their interpretations of Romans 9–11. Both scholars highlight the inseparable bond between Israel and the Church, with Baeck emphasizing Israel's role in divine revelation and Eichholz exploring Paul's insistence on Israel's enduring election. Baeck underscores Israel's enduring role as God's covenant people, viewing it through the dual lenses of mystery and commandment in Jewish thought. Eichholz, building on Paul's theology, affirms the Church's dependence on Israel's election and warns against anti-Judaism by highlighting the shared foundation of divine mercy.

Key words:

Leo Baeck, Georg Eichholz, Church, Israel.

Surprising and shocking

Leo Baeck (1873 – 1956) and Georg Eichholz (1909 – 1973) will probably not have known each other personally or taken note of each other's work. Georg Eichholz was a theological teacher and New Testament scholar at the *Kirchliche Hochschule* in Wuppertal and previously a lecturer at the *Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft*. Leo Baeck was a rabbi, had survived the Holocaust in *Theresienstadt* and had also studied the New Testament as part of his work as a liberal rabbi and Jewish scholar. Georg Eichholz wrote a book on the theology of the apostle Paul¹ and Leo Baeck also repeatedly dealt with Paul throughout his life as a scholar.² Baeck was interested in and respected the "daughter religion" of Judaism, which he regarded Christianity as.

¹ Georg Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972).

² Researchers distinguish three stages in Leo Baeck's engagement with the Apostle Paul: (1) Paul's anti-Jewish and ecclesiastical beliefs (1901 – 1905); (2) The Hellenistic-sacramental faith of Paul (1922 – 1938); (3) The Jewish-Hellenistic faith of Paul (1952 – 1956).

At the end of their research careers both scholars came across the 11th chapter of *The Letter to the Romans*, the content of which was not a question for one of them, but nevertheless moved and even shook them inwardly. For the other, it pointed the way to a new way of thinking about the relationship between the Church and Israel. “Eichholz’s book on St. Paul led to the point where the ‘new perspective’ later began, which no longer saw Paul in strict antithesis to Judaism, but within contemporary Judaism.”³ Leo Baeck had also reached this point when in his 1952 essay “The Faith of Paul” regarded Paul as a Jew who came from the Pharisaic movement and ultimately wanted to be nothing other than a Jew.⁴

While working on the exegesis of Romans 11 Georg Eichholz listened to it as if he was hearing it for the first time: “This is the surprise: that the way of Israel cannot be separated from the way of the world of nations, but rather that both are related to each other.”⁵ What Eichholz formulated as a surprising realization in 1972 was the permanent relationship of the young church to Israel. According to his exegesis of Romans 9–11 he recognized that according to Paul, the people of Israel and the nations belong together, because without the people of Israel there is simply no gospel. And conversely, the way of Israel could not be separated from the way of the nations, because the inclusion of the nations in the salvation of the world was in accordance with God’s will. There was a relationship from Israel to the nations and vice versa from the nations to Israel. What alarmed Paul were the statements directed against Israel that reached his ears from Rome: The casting out of Israel. Against this background Eichholz explains one of the reasons for writing *The Letter to the Romans*: “The Church of Rome urgently needs information about Israel.”⁶ She must learn that in the history of Israel lies her own origin. She can only recognize her gracious existence in the mirror of Israel’s history. If it loosens its ties with Israel, a deadly danger opens within it. For, according to Eichholz, “anti-Semitism is born in the misjudgment of Israel.”⁷ “A lesson that is difficult to practice”⁸ is the one the church must learn. It must understand what grace is: God’s electing mercy towards Israel, which the church only participates in, but neither possesses nor distributes. “The *Ekklesia* participates in God’s electing mercy in which Israel has

³ Jürgen Seim, „Georg Eichholz. Lehrer des evangelischen Rheinlands,“ *Monatshefte für Evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlandes*, no. 59 (2010), 189.

⁴ Leo Baeck. *Werke. 6 Bände. hrsg. von Albert H. Friedlander* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl.-Haus, 2006), vol. 5., 424.

⁵ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 288.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

participated from its beginnings.”⁹ The mystery of Israel is also the mystery of the Church: that God, this God, can only be understood in the sign of his gracious action.¹⁰

With this Georg Eichholz tapped into the very point that was fundamental to the writing of *The Letter to the Romans*. The mercy of God that is granted to all people, first to the members of the people of Israel, which corresponded to the historical order, and then “also”¹¹ to those from the nations to whom Paul found himself called to be an apostle. The fact that the order had been reversed and the people of Israel, or a large part of them, had been put back until the “full number” of the nations had come in was part of a secret that Paul made known to his readership in Rome.

Rarely enough did Paul use the word “mystery” which was certainly used excessively in the pagan environment regarding the many mystery cults. Only in decisive passages, such as the question about the resurrection from the dead in the church of Corinth¹² or the question fate of Israel, does Paul resort to the weighty term “mystery”, which must have been familiar to him from the book of Daniel. For in the book of Daniel, this word, imported from the Aramaic language world of the Babylonian period, was given its apocalyptic edge in the sense of an eschatological secret, i.e. “a veiled announcement of future events determined by God, the revelation and interpretation of which is reserved solely for God and those inspired by his Spirit.”¹³ Paul also saw himself in this function, inspired by the Spirit, gifted with prophetic speech¹⁴ and as a faithful, credible and reliable steward of God’s mysteries,¹⁵ as someone who was entrusted with the treasures of the gospel handled it in trust and knew about God’s plans for salvation.¹⁶ “Paul appeared as a recipient of revelation, as an authoritative role model and as an inspired teacher.”¹⁷

⁹ Rom 11:32.

¹⁰ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 296.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹² 1Cor 15:50ff.

¹³ Günther Bornkamm, „μυστήριον“ in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament: Studienausgabe*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1990), 821.

¹⁴ 1Cor 13:2.

¹⁵ 1Cor 4:1.

¹⁶ Otto Michel, „οικονόμος“, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament: Studienausgabe*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1990), 153.

¹⁷ Udo Schnelle. *Paulus: Leben und Denken* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2014) 142.

The secret of Leo Baeck

Paul's use of the term "mystery" in connection with Israel and its redemption must have made Leo Baeck sit up and take notice. During his studies on Jewish mysticism Baeck had rediscovered this term himself. It is used more frequently in the second edition of his *Essence of Judaism*.¹⁸ There Baeck refers to the polarity of Jewish religious experience: the oscillation between mystery and commandment, distance from God and closeness to God, freedom and strict order. God is experienced as the source of both the mystery and the commandment, and what is more for Baeck the commandment itself becomes a testimony to the mystery: "in the act of revelation it was not God's nature that was revealed to him, but his will."¹⁹

As a reference to the polarity of mystery and commandment Leo Baeck referred to a central sentence from the Book of Deuteronomy: "that which is hidden is for the Eternal, our God, and that which is revealed is for us and our children to do all the words of this teaching."²⁰ In the course of his studies Baeck came to the realization that "the transcendent mystery must not be ignored. Without mysticism Judaism would remain shallow and incomplete. Mystery is the source of the commandment and embeds the commandment in the cosmos."²¹ The Jewish people were interwoven into the mystery of God. For him, they were the people of revelation, following the thought of the reformed rabbi Abraham Geiger. For Leo Baeck the mystery consisted in the fact that the Holy Scriptures and the Temple, the people of Israel, its descendants, its Messiah, with their beginning and their ending belonged to the supramundane – the realm of the ideal. They were thus, like every idea, an original, created by God before the world became into existence. Their pre-existence was explicitly recognized, sometimes poetically, sometimes conceptually.²²

¹⁸ Andreas Pangritz, „'Geheimnis und Gebot' bei Leo Baeck und Dietrich Bonhoeffer,“ in *Leo Baeck - Zwischen Geheimnis und Gebot. Auf dem Weg zu einem progressiven Judentum der Moderne*, eds. Verena Mühlstein and Frank Wössner (Karlsruhe: Verlag. Ev. Presseverb. für Baden, 1997), 232.

¹⁹ Walter Homolka, „Leo Baecks System der Polarität,“ in *Leo Baeck - Zwischen Geheimnis und Gebot. Auf dem Weg zu einem progressiven Judentum der Moderne*, eds. Verena Mühlstein and Frank Wössner (Karlsruhe: Verlag. Ev. Presseverb. für Baden, 1997), 153

²⁰ Deut. 29:28. Cf. Andreas Pangritz, „'Geheimnis und Gebot' bei Leo Baeck und Dietrich Bonhoeffer,“ 234.

²¹ Michael Meyer, *Leo Baeck: Rabbiner in bedrängter Zeit* (C. H. Beck: München, 2021), 106.

²² Baeck saw the influence of the Alexandrian-Greek philosophy of revelation having an effect on Palestinian-Jewish thought, namely that it had experienced an elevation of the messianic idea to the supernatural.

The faith of Paul

In *The Faith of Paul* Leo Baeck repeats this view:

"The Jewish people play an essential role in Paul's faith because they are part of divine revelation and belong to the sphere of mystery. Mystery means the event through which the unknown God becomes recognizable. He showed himself to humanity by revealing himself to the Jewish people – a revelation that is also redemption."²³

Baeck writes that Israel "recognized itself as a historical people as much as it thought of itself as a 'metaphysical' people."²⁴ From its history this people had understood its mission, its path, but according to Baeck this history "emerges from the world of mystery, from the great unity, from the deep ground of all that is."²⁵ Rooted in the mystery of God Baeck always saw Israel as connected to all of humanity. Baeck's theology of Jewish existence is a theology of God's covenant with Israel and all humanity and in service to all humanity. Not as a people of a history, but as a people *of* history Israel is also a people of humanity. "Just as it can never think of itself without God, nor may it, nor can it, so neither can it think of itself without the whole of humanity."²⁶ As Isaiah prophesied that Israel, as God's servant, would become the light to the nations and that salvation would reach to the ends of the earth.²⁷ Whoever this servant of God was, a single person, the prophet himself or the "people of Israel" it was not enough for God that the servant would only bring the scattered people of Israel back to Jerusalem. The nations were also to come to Zion to find peace there. So was Noah's blessing to be fulfilled, that "Japheth would dwell in the tents of Shem."²⁸

The nations are part of Israel's existence, or as Georg Eichholz put it: "That is the surprise: that the way of Israel cannot be separated from the way of the nations, but rather that both are related to each other."²⁹

The continuing reference of the young church to Israel is significant for the question of addressees. In the section on Israel Georg Eichholz is saying: "The only conceivable addressee is the young church of Rome, which Paul sees as being in danger of writing off

²³ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 5, 440.

²⁴ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 2, 54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁷ Isa. 49, 6.

²⁸ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 4, 427.

²⁹ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 291.

Israel and no longer considering Israel's election to be valid at present."³⁰ We do not know whether this fundamental question, the question of whether God had cast off his people, reached Paul in a letter or orally from travelers coming from Rome? In any case Paul begins the 11th chapter of his *Letter to the Romans* with this question and answers it with an energetic contradiction: "So I ask, has God cast off his people? Far be it from him!"³¹ Paul and all Jewish worshippers were aware of the statement that God would never cast off his people, as it is stated in the Psalms.³² Paul considers the possibility that God could cast off his people and ends with an exclamation of dismay: never!³³ In the Greek text the words for God (θεός) and people (λαός) stand so close together as if to indicate how closely God and his people stand by and for each other. In German one would say that not a sheet of paper fits between the two – they belong so closely together.³⁴ Paul's assertion of Israel's transgression made it clear that the young Church of Rome was in urgent need of instruction on what God's people were all about and that without this knowledge of Israel's history and its biblical promises it was simply not possible to be a Christian. "The church must know about Israel, because otherwise it no longer knows itself (cf. Rom 11:25),"³⁵ wrote Georg Eichholz.

Eichholz refers to the group of people who believed Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel as the "young church".³⁶ The term church with the adjective young points to the assumption that at the time of Paul there was already something like an independent institution such as an organized church in its infancy. From today's perspective it is difficult to accept this. Rather we have to imagine a community of people who felt they belonged to the synagogue and took part in the services and meetings of the Jews of Rome, but who mainly held their meetings in private houses.³⁷ About three decades after Paul, when the Luke writes the *Acts of the Apostles* he still described the community of people around the crucified and risen Jesus as a branch within Judaism. In Luke's perception and depiction there wasn't yet an independent "church" separated from Judaism.

Nevertheless Eichholz's term the "young church" is not a bad choice because it expresses something that was new about this community: the coexistence of non-Jews and

³⁰ Jürgen Seim, „Georg Eichholz. Lehrer des evangelischen Rheinlands,“.

³¹ Rom 11,1.

³² Ps 94: 14: "For he will not forsake his people!"

³³ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 291.

³⁴ Robert Jewitt. *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 653.

³⁵ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 291.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Schnelle, *Paulus*, 149.

Jews in an assembly with shared meals. We are told in *Galatians* and *Acts* that this form of fellowship and communal meals between Jews and non-Jews was rejected by a group of law-abiding Jews and led to fierce disputes. In some of the synagogues in Rome there must also have been major disputes over the question of whether Jesus was the expected Messiah or not – which led to unrest in Rome and the expulsion of Jews from it.³⁸ It is therefore not surprising that people who were Jewish on the one hand, but who tolerated and practiced communion with non-Jews, distanced themselves or became segregated in some cases. Their meeting places would have been their private apartments and houses in order to avoid further conflicts; similar to later Pietist groups in Germany in the 18th century who wanted or needed to distance themselves from the theology and religious practice of regional church congregations. This segregation practice must have had an implication on Paul: the turning away from Israel, from its history, its calling and election, its special and lasting bond with God. According to Eichholz

“the church that is no longer turned towards Israel, that no longer knows what to do with Israel’s history (with God’s history with Israel!), no longer knows its own origin, no longer recognizes its gracious existence, no longer understands itself in the mirror of Israel’s history.”³⁹

The new community

What was new about the Jesus’s community was that Jews met with non-Jewish people, cultivated fellowship, and also shared meals together. “Rather the church is one *ecclesia* of the Jews and Gentiles.”⁴⁰ According to Paul it seemed unnecessary for non-Jews to become Jews in order to share in the salvation of Christ. In the new community human classifications had become secondary as he so inimitably put it in his *Letter to the Galatians*: “Here there is neither Jew nor Greek, here there is neither slave nor free, here there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁴¹ For the time of salvation that had now dawned, which was confirmed in the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead, people from the nations simply belonged. Why? Because it had been prophesied in the biblical writings of the Old Testament.⁴² The addition of the nations to the people of Israel, at the end of the time in

³⁸ The Edict of Claudius, 49 AD.

³⁹ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 292.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁴¹ Gal 3, 28.

⁴² Isaiah 2, 1–22.

which Paul thought he was living, was taking effect through baptism.⁴³ According to Paul, this new direction of faith therefore rightly existed. This was the result of his work as an apostle to the nations. It also the success of his work as an apostle to the nations. He, Paul, a member of the people of Israel, found himself called by God to be the one to bring the light of the gospel to the nations. This is what Georg Eichholz meant by the term “the way of the nations”. The way of Israel and the way of the nations now grew together.

In his late 1952 essay on the apostle Paul, Leo Baeck, like Georg Eichholz, came to the 11th chapter of Romans at the end of his writing on Paul. Baeck was aware that a new era would dawn with the coming of the Messiah. It was equally clear to him that this would also affect the significance of the Torah. He explained this through the teaching of the epochs of world history rooted in Judaism. Christ could be the end of the law because according to Baeck’s Jewish understanding it was logical that “when the days of the Messiah begin, the days of the Torah come to an end.”⁴⁴ According to Baeck Paul did not step out of the Jewish worldview with this view. That a new world age would one day dawn was “the common belief of the Jewish people.”⁴⁵ It was common sense.

Jewish people and non-Jews belong together

In this part of the paper, I want to take into consideration if Baeck and Eichholz meet in agreement in their exegesis of Romans 11. Eichholz maintained that Israel and the world of nations are permanently related to one another. Baeck also argued that the terms Jewish people and Gentiles belong together. There can be no fulfillment without both. The coming of the Messiah and the coming of the nations are connected.

According to Paul the Jewish people remained a component of the messianic “Christ” faith. Leo Baeck found the 11th chapter of Romans so shocking because it “revealed” to him the sincerity of the apostle Paul and showed him the “depth” of his feelings rooted in the

⁴³ Cf. Eberhard Busch, *Meine Zeit mit Karl Barth: Tagebuch 1965–1968* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 333: “A person enters baptism into the holy nation of Israel, which according to Isaiah 42:6 is destined to be the mediator of the covenant among the nations.”

⁴⁴ Stefan Schreiner, „Leo Baeck und das Neue Testament Anmerkungen zur Methodologie seiner neutestamentlichen Studien,“ in *Leo Baeck - Zwischen Geheimnis und Gebot. Auf dem Weg zu einem progressiven Judentum der Moderne*, eds. Verena Mühlstein and Frank Wössner (Karlsruhe: Verlag. Ev. Presseverb. für Baden, 1997), 215.

⁴⁵ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 5, 440.

Jewish people.⁴⁶ Paul could not even imagine Israel being cast out, wrote Leo Baeck. Following the *Targum Jonathan* he translated the Greek “μὴ γένοιτο” (Rom 11:1) with which Paul vigorously rejected the claim that Israel had been cast out, back into Aramaic as “*chulin hu lecha*”. The violation of Israel would be tantamount to the desecration of God’s blessed, sanctified and chosen people.⁴⁷ At the end of his essay Baeck demonstrates the inseparability of God and his people with a quote from a Midrash on the Jewish Pentecost. “It is as if God said: ‘I cannot cast them off for another people. I can only afflict them with tribulation’.”⁴⁸ This sentence in Baeck’s essay on Paul, written a few years after the *Shoah*, should be just as “shocking” for today’s Christian reader as Baeck’s discovery of the 11th chapter of Romans. The secret of the Jewish people is suffering. God reveals himself in suffering. But then it must also be true that the suffering Messiah and the suffering people belong together as an idea originating in Judaism. One cannot praise the suffering of the Messiah and detach him and his work from the context of the Jewish people whose existence is determined by suffering. Paul’s words in which he describes the depth of his feelings, and the pain are a large part of his Jewish identity “kindred according to the flesh.”⁴⁹ He cannot confess that “Christ the Lord” is⁵⁰ without also saying “that God raised Jesus from the dead.” This rejection causes Paul “great sadness and pain in his heart without ceasing.”⁵¹ The affliction with which God afflicts his people and which Paul suffers so intensely⁵² must ultimately have a meaning for Paul as a theologian. For him it had to be that God had made his people blind and deaf⁵³ until the fullness of the nations had attained salvation.⁵⁴ That was his secret which he made known to the young church in Rome. He sums it up with the famous parable of the olive tree: through faith in Jesus as Lord and through the reconciliation that Jesus brought the believers from the nations are grafted into the noble olive tree as wild branches and thus become part of the community of salvation in Israel. However, tearing off and adding branches could not affect the indestructible holiness of the root. The holy and eternal root is Israel. And indeed “all

⁴⁶ Cf. Schnelle, *Paulus*, 8–9: “The Pauline letters provide an insight into the apostle’s thinking, but also into his emotional life, for the period from around 50–61 AD. For long stretches, they are emotionally characterized and allow the man Paul with his strengths and weaknesses to emerge before our mind’s eye.”

⁴⁷ Ex 19:6.

⁴⁸ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 5, 442.

⁴⁹ Rom 9:3.

⁵⁰ Rom 10:9.

⁵¹ Rom 9:2.

⁵² Gal 6:17.

⁵³ Rom 11:8.

⁵⁴ Rom 11:25.

Israel” as Paul expressly emphasizes with the language pattern (כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל) from the book of Deuteronomy and Joshua.⁵⁵ All Israel is also the “true” Israel and not just a part of Israel.⁵⁶ The certainly symbolically chosen number 12 of Jesus’ disciples can therefore mean nothing other than the participation of “All Israel” in the messianic hope. “All Israel has a share in the world to come (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10,1).”⁵⁷ The image of the holy root of the olive tree could mean nothing other than that Israel remained and would always remain the supporting foundation for the people of the nations who had become believers.

In *“This People”* Baeck similarly points out that at all times there were members of the people of Israel who followed the temptations of the pagan environment and left the tribe: “But even if leaves fell, even if branches were cut down, the strength of the tribe remained, and it continues to strive upwards.”⁵⁸ Leo Baeck already referred to the 11th chapter of *The Letter to the Romans* in his 1938 book *“The Gospel as a Document of the Jewish History of Faith”*. Here, according to him, the congregation of the apostles was still a congregation within the Jewish people, not alongside the Jews or even against them. For Baeck the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 AD was the decisive caesura as a “tremendous catastrophe” that shook the Jewish spirit to its core and had to be understood as an apocalyptic event that demanded a response.⁵⁹ If God had judged, it was against Israel. And were the events of 70 AD not proof that the apostle Paul was ultimately wrong when he emphasized God’s lasting election and uncanceled covenant with Israel? Had God not pronounced his judgment on the Jewish people, who had refused to believe, through the catastrophe?⁶⁰ As a result the church increasingly voted against the people of Israel. Words of comfort became words of condemnation. In the period after the 70 the fact that God had turned away from his people became more and more the “creed of the church” and the destruction of the temple was carried into the Gospels as an apocalyptic sign in the words of Jesus.⁶¹ “In a story preserved in the Talmud (Chagiga 5b), a Christian stood opposite the rabbi Yeshuah ben Chananiah, a teacher from the generation after the destruction of the temple,

⁵⁵ Deut 11:6; 13:12; 21:21; Jos. 3:7; 7:24.

⁵⁶ For a different opinion see Schnelle, *Paulus*, 369.

⁵⁷ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 4, 19.

⁵⁸ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 2, 71. Baeck saw Christianity in the “fallen branches” category that detached themselves from the tribe.

⁵⁹ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 4, 430.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 431.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

and solemnly told the rabbi that the Jewish people were now the people from whom the Lord had turned away his face.”⁶²

Summary

“From its origin, the church is the one *ecclesia* of Israel and the world of the nations.”⁶³ In his *Letter to the Romans* Paul fought for respectful coexistence in one church and for a lasting bond between his people Israel and the believers from the nations in one church. Paul had experienced the realization of his conviction in Antioch. There, Jews, and believers from the world of nations had encountered each other in an appreciative manner, celebrated worship and ate together. For Paul this event was the fulfillment of prophetic promises: that at the end of time the nations would be allowed to enter God’s covenant with his people. It became the content of his apostolic task. However there was considerable resistance to this cross-ethnic community from the ranks of law-abiding Jews. They attached conditions to the new coexistence: conversion to Judaism and thus also the observance of dietary regulations. Paul defended the non-Jews, on whom he did not want to impose any conditions, as Jesus had freed them from constraints and given those who followed him the freedom to love. Jews and non-Jews should be able to remain together in one church under the commandment of love.⁶⁴

In *The Letter to the Romans* it can be assumed that the problem between Jews and non-Jews in joint assemblies had been reversed. Here it was the non-Jews in the congregation, perhaps those from the higher classes of the city of Rome, who harassed the Jews, who had been pushed into the minority with anti-Jewish slogans claiming that God had rejected Israel. As you can imagine these attacks endangered the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews in a community. Here too Paul fought with all his passion for the unity and continuity of Jews and non-Jews in one church and against an obvious omission of Israel, which he opposes and taught the believers from the nations about the dignity of the Jewish people.

At the beginning of the 9th chapter of Romans Paul lists the permanent signa and honorific titles of the people of Israel. These include not only filiation, the covenant, the promises, worship, and the commandments, but also Christ. Thus, the Messiah who comes

⁶² *Ibid.*, 432.

⁶³ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 289.

⁶⁴ Gal 5:14.

from the promises of the fathers belongs entirely on the side of Israel – “Christ is primarily the Christ of Israel.”⁶⁵ The Messiah cannot be thought of as separate from his people. The inscription above the cross of Golgotha had already announced to the world that Jesus belonged on the side of Israel: Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews. Because the Messiah belongs so completely to Israel a rejection of Israel would ultimately be tantamount to a “desecration” of God who had called and chosen this people. The history of Israel as a history with and of God is the origin of the Church.

Israel is part of divine revelation. And whoever turns away from Israel leaves the trunk and the root that contains such revelation. It is the revelation of God’s mercy that ultimately applies to both Jews and non-Jews. The Church can only hope for the same mercy in which Israel’s salvation and hope is resolved.⁶⁶ The way of Israel and the way of the world of nations thus remain interrelated and interconnected. The mystery of Israel is also the mystery of the Church, in which both share in God’s electing mercy.

The mystery of Israel is also the mystery of the suffering that God could repeatedly bring upon Israel, such as the hardening towards the reality of the Messiah Jesus that Paul claimed, but which he interpreted as limited and temporary. This existed functionally to allow the nations access to the community of salvation: Israel.⁶⁷ The mystery of Israel is also the mystery of the tribulation that God brought upon Israel so that the nations could find their way to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And the mystery of the Church is that it only gained access to the God of Israel through this temporary setting aside of Israel. The tribulation that Israel experienced became happiness for the nations. The suffering that Jesus experienced became salvation for Israel and the nations. The idea of the suffering Messiah and the idea of the suffering people therefore belong together. Despite this hardening towards the message that the one from Nazareth was God’s Messiah, “this people” remained a part of divine revelation. Both the Church and Israel can be blinded and enlightened by God, but God’s mercy remains the great parenthesis in which both live, be it in tribulation or in joy. The interaction and polarity of mercy and affliction, taking in and removing the branches of the olive tree can be the fate of both.⁶⁸ In the course of its history Israel had indeed interpreted times of suffering as punishment, as blindness and as tribulation because of its

⁶⁵ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 291.

⁶⁶ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 288.

⁶⁷ Isa 59:20.

⁶⁸ Rom 11:22.

disobedience to God, certainly, but even more so and again and again and certainly also ultimately experienced God's heartfelt mercy.

With his theological construction of a temporary hardening of Israel which Paul found prefigured in the prophet Isaiah he entered dangerous territory despite all his assertions of Israel's prerogative. From here it was only a small step for his followers, especially after the devastating experiences for Israel in the years 66 – 70 AD, to declare Israel rejected by God. One must read *The Letter to the Romans*, and especially chapters 9–11, again and again and take note of the message of Israel's lasting election in order not to fall into the devastating trap of anti-Judaism. Unfortunately, the development then went beyond Paul in precisely the direction that still harasses and mortally endangers Jews today.

The *ecclesia* turned into a purely national church that had forgotten that it existed because it only shared in God's electing mercy for Israel. The undeserved mercy of God stands like a great arch over both: Israel and the "young" church. Paul recognized the meaning of the changing fate of Israel and the Church in the fact that in the end God triumphs in his mercy; that he must become the merciful one for the Jew, but also for the man from the world of the nations who brings both out of their lostness and tribulation in order to win them to the praise of his mercy and thus open them up to one another.⁶⁹ Yes, the believers from the nations in Rome should learn to rejoice with God's people and accept one another as God had accepted them for his praise.⁷⁰ Paul also concludes the 11th chapter of *The Letter to the Romans* with a praise that extols the richness, wisdom and inscrutability of God's ways. Both Jews and non-Jews live from God's mercy and his electing compassion. Why should they not be able to live together and remain together in an end-time church? Paul fought for this. For a church of his chosen people in unity with believers from the world of nations, so that Japheth may dwell in the tents of Shem, for "there can be no fulfillment without both".⁷¹

⁶⁹ Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss*, 301.

⁷⁰ Rom 15: 7.

⁷¹ Baeck. *Werke*. vol. 5, 442.

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