

“God as an Incarnated Jew – a Contradiction in Terms?”

Sonja Huber | ORCID: 0009-0009-3907-6583

Doctoral Student, University of Vienna Faculty of Catholic Theology:
Universität Wien Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, Vienna, Austria
sonja.huber@univie.ac.at

Received 6 February 2024 | Accepted 29 October 2024 |

Published online 5 December 2024

Abstract

This essay brings the Jewishness of Jesus of Nazareth into conversation with Christian conceptions of the incarnation. Thereby, not only linguistic, biblical-scientific and dogmatic aspects are considered, but above all Jewish perspectives, especially theses of Michael Wyschogrod.

Keywords

incarnation – anti-Judaism – Michael Wyschogrod

1 At the Beginning of the End of Anti-Jewish Christian Theologies

“Ich bin schockiert über das Maß an Antijudaismus, das ich [...] beobachte.”¹ – This statement by Michael Wyschogrod from 1995, with reference to the discussions following the declaration “Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden” by 13 theology professors of Bonn in response to the “Rheinischen Synodalbeschluss” in 1980, is unfortunately still topical and not just limited to specific occasions. Even if there has been an increased effort to avoid explicit

¹ Wyschogrod, *Inkarnation aus jüdischer Sicht*, p. 13.

anti-Judaism in recent decades, Christian theologies are still permeated by implicit anti-Judaism of various kinds.

The simple fact that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew, a Jew from head to toe, from the cradle to the grave, is clearly recognizable from all four Gospels – and yet for almost two millennia it was concealed, suppressed, whitewashed by a- and anti-Jewish views of the person of Jesus. As a result, for centuries the anti-Judaism cultivated in Christian theology, liturgy and catechetics provided the breeding ground for National Socialist ideas, especially for their effectiveness.

This breeding ground is described by Michael Wyschogrod with the following words:

while Nazism of course was not a Christian teaching as such – indeed it was largely an anti-Christian teaching – nevertheless, the Holocaust could probably not have occurred if not for the two thousand years of preparation that took place in the ‘teaching of contempt.’ The phrase was coined by Jules Isaac, a French Jewish scholar who used this expression to refer to the age old teaching in so many Christian sources of contempt for Judaism.²

In the following, due to the particularly topical nature of the problem outlined in view of the growing right-wing populist tendencies in politics, society and the church, as well as in view of the increasing acts of violence motivated by anti-Semitism, an attempt will be made to approach it by taking into account Jewish premises and perspectives, based on one of the most central areas of Christian faith tradition, the incarnation, whereby I will be inspired above all by Michael Wyschogrod's theses, supplemented by a few other authors.³ This topic is “undoubtedly the most difficult in the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. [...] It is a topic usually postponed in Jewish/Christian dialogue again and again, and very often never dealt with”,⁴ according to Wyschogrod.

² Wyschogrod, *Resurrection*, p. 104 et seq.

³ Elsewhere, with not necessarily limited space, other positions relevant to the topic could be discussed in detail, such as Amy-Jill Levine's (e. g. *The Misunderstood Jew. The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*), Paula Fredriksen's (e. g. *From Jesus to Christ. The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ; The Birth of Christianity and the Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism*), Barbara U. Meyer's (e. g. *Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory. Theological and Philosophical Explorations*) and many others.

⁴ Wyschogrod, *Incarnation*, p. 208.

2 In the Beginning Was not the Prologue

Christian ideas about the incarnation of God in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth are predominantly based on one part of a single Bible verse: the beginning of John 1:14 (“Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο”, “And the Word was made flesh”). In contrast to the synoptic Gospels, a text was placed at the beginning of the Gospel of John that differs fundamentally in style and use of words, in content and theology from the text that follows from John 1:19 onwards. The prologue John 1:1–18 was written in the most literal sense as “pro logos”, because the term “ὁ λόγος” is used in a unique way in comparison with all other occurrences in the Gospel of John. Nowhere else does the meaning of this term go beyond the common, general-language connotations. It can also be noted that in the Gospel of John from John 1:19 onwards, for example in John 8:55; 10:35; 14:24 or 17:14, “ὁ λόγος” is used in statements that are contrary in content to John 1:14. For example, it says in John 8:55: “but I know him [God], and keep his saying.” (“ἀλλ’ οἶδα αὐτὸν καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ”). A Jesus who regarded himself as the Word of God made flesh in the sense of John 1:14 would not have been able to make this statement in any meaningful way.

Moreover, the fact that the prologue to the Gospel of John itself appears incoherent, and as consisting of several sections joined together, has already been pointed out many times. What is striking is precisely the leap in content which has been preserved exactly before John 1:14 and which has not been erased by later redactors. The reflection on all who are “born of God” (“ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν”) instead of “of the will of the flesh” (“ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς”) could have led to the following verse, in which “σὰρξ” (“flesh”) could have served as a connecting link. However, this is not a further development of the previous thought, but a return to v. 4, which last referred to the “λόγος”. The aforementioned leap in content between vv. 13 and 14 does not prepare the statement of v. 14, but the exclusivity attributed to Jesus is weakened by other people being “born of God”. Moreover, after v. 9 (“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”), it would no longer have been absolutely necessary to add v. 14. Thus, v. 14 is clearly one of several disparate individual parts from which the prologue to the Gospel of John was assembled.

In the broad spectrum of views on the origin and function of the prologue of John in relation to the rest of the Gospel of the same name, Michael Theobald came to plausible conclusions in his 1988 habilitation thesis “Die Fleischwerdung des Logos” which is still up to date. Therein, he concludes:

Die Überzeugung, der Joh-Prolog sei *nicht* die Keimzelle, aus der heraus die Christologie des Corpus Evangelii sich entwickelt habe, hat zu ihrem

Ahnherren A. v. Harnack, der sie den Tübingern im Gefolge F. C. Baurs abgerungen hat. Der richtige Kern seiner ansonsten überholten These, der Prolog sei eine Einführung für hellenistische Leser in ein ihnen fremdes Buch, ist aufbewahrt in der heute weitverbreiteten Überzeugung, der Prolog gehöre nicht an den Anfang der joh. Überlieferungsgeschichte, sondern an deren Ende.⁵

According to Theobald, the prologue was “zur Bewältigung einer christologischen Krise geschaffen”, in which it was a matter of “in einem für seine Gemeinde existenzbedrohenden Konflikt ein klärendes, wegweisendes Wort zu sprechen”. However, the author of the prologue had “den konkreten ‚Sitz im Leben‘ seines Textes verborgen und seine Leseanweisung für das Ev mit der Aura eines heiligen Textes umgeben.”⁶

If one takes into account the fact that the oldest surviving written record of John’s prologue is Papyrus 66 (Papyrus Bodmer 11), it can be assumed that John’s prologue was written at a much later date than is generally supposed. Papyrus 66 was asserted to date “aus der Zeit um 200”⁷ shortly after its discovery. In 1968, Gordon D. Fee still claimed the same, or at best considered an earlier date possible.⁸ Commentators still rely on these assessments today.⁹

Brent Nongbri, on the other hand, concluded in 2014 from his meticulous and cogent research: “[...] the combined weight of these considerations points to a date for the production of P. Bodmer 11 in the early or middle part of the fourth century.”¹⁰ It is therefore not only possible that the prologue to John, and in particular the seemingly separately inserted verse 14 from it, was written in the late second century CE and placed before the Gospel of John, but that this happened not until the period around the Council of Nicaea.¹¹

It should also be borne in mind that in later centuries “dieser Text in der Überlieferungs- und Auslegungsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments auch

5 Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos*, p. 489.

6 Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos*, p. 493.

7 Aland, *Papyrus Bodmer 11*, p. 163, similarly Collins, *Papyrus Bodmer 11*, p. 281.

8 Fee, *Papyrus Bodmer 11* (P66), p. 3.

9 See for example Kobel, *Evangelium nach Johannes*.

10 Nongbri, *The Limits of Palaeographic Dating of Literary Papyri*, p. 35.

11 This possibility is consistent with Theobald’s assessment that the Gospel of John had “keinen Autorenschutz”: “Es war nicht unantastbar, sondern wurde fortgeschrieben. Man las es in den johanneischen Gemeinden, empfing Orientierung aus ihm, stritt wohl auch über seine Deutung und trug kleinere oder größere Ergänzungen nach, bis das Buch schließlich die Letztgestalt fand, in der es die Kirche eroberte.” (Theobald, *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum*, p. 4).

selbständig wahrgenommen und verwendet wurde. Wie wenig anderen Texten aus den Evangelien erkannte man dem Prolog eine besondere Bedeutung zu”, according to Wolfgang Augustyn.

Schon in der Spätantike berührte man mit diesem Evangelium den Kopf von Kranken bei Fieber – auch dafür war Augustinus Zeuge –, und noch im 12. Jahrhundert wurde es mancherorts am Krankenbett gelesen. Man führte den Text des Prologs (oder dessen Überschrift) als Amulett mit sich.¹²

This text was therefore regarded as having a special magical meaning and – which is crucially – as being independent of the rest of the Gospel of John, as if it were sufficient in itself.

3 Neither at nor in the Beginning: on the Problematic Nature of the Concept and Idea of an “Incarnation”

3.1 *Linguistic Aspects*

The very term “incarnation” reveals its emergence at a time that was preceded by at least two processes of linguistic, cultural, ideological and religious transformation. It was derived from the Latin word “caro”, a word that neither Jesus nor his disciples as possible first bearers of traditions nor the first authors and editors of written records would have known.

Linguistically, the term “insarxation” would be somewhat closer to the circumstances at the time of Jesus, although here too it would be highly questionable whether the term $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ is at least approximately congruent in meaning with the term רִצְּרָצָה , which could at best be used by Jesus.

Although in the Septuagint the term רִצְּרָצָה is translated with the term $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$, two questions nevertheless arise: 1. Was the same or at least similar content associated with the terms רִצְּרָצָה or $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ at all times when the Old Testament texts were handed down and written down? 2. Can it be assumed that the author(s) or editors of the Gospel of John or at least of the prologue had the same or at least a similar understanding of the term $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$?

In any case, the fact is that the term $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ plays an extremely minor role in the synoptic gospels: It is found in three places in the Gospel of Matthew, two in the Gospel of Mark and once in the Gospel of Luke. The Matthean Jesus

¹² Augustyn, *Inkarnationschristologie in den Bildkünsten des Mittelalters*, p. 246 et seq.

comments on Simon Barjona's statement that he considers Jesus to be "ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος" ("the Christ, the Son of the living God") with the words: "μακάριος εἶ, Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ ἀπεκάλυψέν σοι ἀλλ' ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς" ("Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven", Mt 16:16f).

Here, the term σὰρξ appears as part of the phrase "flesh and blood", which may be meant as a synonym for humanity, in contrast to God. However, it is also conceivable that the term "Bar-jona", which only appears here, is intended to construct a contrast between the father of Simon and the divine father of Jesus: It was not "flesh and blood", i.e. Simon's father, who had revealed to him the aforementioned designation of Jesus, but his (Jesus') Father in heaven.

Mt 19:5f alludes to Gen 2:24, but there is no reinterpretation of the term σὰρξ/רֶשֶׁת. However, Mt 26:41 is interesting, where the Matthean Jesus connotes the term σὰρξ negatively "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (the parallel passage in Mark 14:38 is identical). However, it remains unclear whether he is making a general human statement here, referring directly to his disciples and expressing his disappointment that they had not complied with his request "tarry ye here, and watch with me" (26:38), or whether he is expressing a self-experience that he had previously had.

The latter is supported by the fact that he calls on his disciples to watch and pray (v. 41, in contrast to v. 38: watch), that in v. 37 it says: "he [...] began to be sorrowful and very heavy", and that in v. 39 he prays: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." According to the narrative of Matthew's Gospel, the temptation would have been that Jesus did not want to go the way that he had claimed shortly before, for example in 26:24, that "the Son of man goeth as it is written". But what exactly would the Matthean Jesus in v. 41 mean by the term σὰρξ? In v. 38, he spoke of his "soul" ("ἡ ψυχὴ μου") being "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death", possibly referring to Ps 42:6.12 or Ps 43:5. If one does not read contents from some Pauline or Paul-attributed epistolary literature into the Gospel of Matthew or Mark, it remains unclear what the contrast between spirit and flesh in Mt 26:41 or Mk 14:38 may have been understood to mean at the time of writing or editing this passage. Especially in connection with the concept and idea of an "incarnation", however, these are highly significant passages. If we are to assume a contrast (of whatever kind) between spirit and flesh in Jesus' statement in the passages mentioned, would the incarnation of the (Johannine) divine word be understood as an acceptance of the "weak", as an appearance as sinful "flesh"? However, this problem only arises when an attempt is made

to transfer a concept that was only formed on the basis of a statement in the prologue of John's Gospel to the stories of the synoptic Gospels. In my opinion, it is precisely this approach that is highly questionable.

As open as the meaning of the term $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\xi}$ remains in Mt 26:41/Mk 14:38, the term appears with clear connotations in Lk 24:39, the only other place in the synoptic Gospels where it occurs at all. In it, the risen Jesus appears to his disciples and wants to convince them that they have himself before them with the words: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”

3.2 *Biblical Aspects*

3.2.1 “Gottbildlichkeit”¹³ of Man

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps 8:3f). In view of the overwhelming size and sheer endless expanse of the night sky, this verse describes the feeling of insignificance of its author, insignificance in relation to the universe, but above all in relation to its creator. Nevertheless, the experience of being accepted by God also resonates, of God's remembrance of man as such and probably of the author of the text in particular. However, the sixfold use of the personal pronoun “you” and its declensions is central: They emphasize the unique greatness of God, tangible in his creation.

In many respects, an astonishing continuation follows: “You have made him only a little less than God, you have crowned him with splendor and glory. You have made him ruler over the works of your hands; you have put everything under his feet”¹⁴ (Ps 8:5f). First, this is astonishing because of the linguistic mixture of direct address to God and communication to the reader in the first half-sentence, which, paraphrasing the biblical text, would make more sense as a pure direct address to God: “For thou hast made him a little lower than you”. Astonishing is also the change in content compared to the previous verse:

13 Cf. Neumann-Gorsolke, *Gottebenbildlichkeit* (AT), who argues in favor of the term “Gottbildlichkeit” or “Bild-Gottes-Sein” of man instead of “Gottebenbildlichkeit”, when she writes: “Ohnehin ist die Formulierung ‘Gottebenbildlichkeit’ aus dem Blickwinkel des Alten Testaments problematisch, da der Wortteil ‘eben’ der LXX-Übersetzung entspringt, während der hebräische Text von der ‘Gottbildlichkeit’ bzw. dem ‘Bild-Gottes-Sein’ des Menschen spricht.”

14 This is my translation of the text of the Einheitsübersetzung, whereas the King's James Version translates “angels” instead of “God”, which can be found in some sources. In the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, however, the word “אֱלֹהִים” is used: “וְתַחֲסֶרְהוּ מַעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תִּעֲטֶרְהוּ”.

Man, who experiences himself as insignificant, is suddenly described as “only a little less than God”. The mediation of these different perspectives takes place again through the “you”, because God remains the active one, previously as the creator of the heavens, here as the one who crowns man “with splendor and glory” and establishes him as “ruler”. If being only slightly less than God could lead people to hubris, Ps 8 emphasizes that it was only God who gave people this closeness (in the sense of similarity) to God. In this psalm, man thus sees himself as the ruler over the work of God’s “hands”, but immediately after listing the animals to be ruled, he breaks out again in exuberant praise of the Creator: “O LORD our Lord, How excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Ps 8:9)

An even closer relationship between God and man is outlined in Gen 1:26, when it says: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”. As in Ps 8, this is immediately followed by the wish that people should “have dominion” over the other living beings on earth. In v. 27, the previously not clearly monotheistic statement is specified and put in the singular (“his (...) image” instead of “our image”): “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him”. However, this singular, the image of God, has the external appearance of a plural: “male and female created he them.” This being-created *בְּצִלְמֵנוּ אֱלֹהִים*, κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ, is not negated or revoked at any point in the Old Testament. Man’s likeness to God is also clearly expressed in Gen 5:1: “In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him.”¹⁵

Chronological readers of the book of Genesis can place this “after” the so-called “fall of man”. If one were to argue here that the phrase “in the day God created man” refers to a “primal state” before the “fall of man”, then Genesis 5:2f speaks against such a view: “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth”. The similarity to God becomes clear precisely through the parallelism of procreation and naming. Moreover, the so-called “fall of man” in the story of Gen 3:1–24 only has the consequences described in verses 14–19. On the other hand, nowhere is there any mention of the multiple falls of man described from Gen 4:3 onwards being the consequence of the event in the Garden of Eden described in Gen 3. If one does not read the book of Genesis or the entire Old Testament chronologically, but keeps in mind the different times in which the texts were written, Genesis 3:1–24 can be seen as an attempt to explain the existence of the hardships of life (death, tribulation, enmity between parts of the animal and human world) within

15 The description of the fatal consequence of killing a human being in Gen 9:6 is also justified by this: “for in the image of God made he man”.

a mythological framework, but not as a demonstration of a hereditary basic depravity of humanity.

If we consider the redemption of (hereditary) sinful humanity through the violent death of a god-man/man-god as a necessary moving force, as the actual goal of the incarnation of the second divine person, then this very purpose stands, or rather: falls, through the view of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis outlined here.

3.2.2 "Depravity" of Man as a "Being of Flesh"?

In the legendary story of Gen 6:1–4, God reacts to the fact that "the sons of God" took "daughters of men" as wives with the words: "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." (6:3) Here, the term "flesh" can be interpreted as having a negative connotation. However, this term does not have a negative image at all in many other places in the Old Testament, for example in Gen 17:13: "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh (בְּשָׂרְכֶם) for an everlasting covenant", or in Gen 29:14: "And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh", where it simply expresses the close relationship between Jacob and Laban.

The term "flesh" appears in Psalm 16 as a synonym for the mortal nature of human beings, combined with the praying person's confidence that this mortal nature will also be safe with God posthumously, because the praying person has "the LORD always before me" (v. 8): "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (v. 9f)

In Ps 63, it is also the entirety of man in his lifetime that is stretched out towards God. God is as necessary for survival as water is for the soul (נַפְשִׁי) and flesh (בְּשָׂרִי) of man, when it says: "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps 63:2). It was formulated similarly in Ps 84:3: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

3.2.3 No Prediction or Expectation of an Incarnation of God

As much as the authors and/or editors of the canonical Gospels endeavored to demonstrate the necessity of more or less significant details from the accounts of Jesus' life by means of quotations and references to text passages from the Old Testament, in the sense of the fulfillment of Old Testament "prophecies" in and through the person of Jesus, it is astonishing that not even a single passage in the Old Testament could be found that could at least have been adapted

to indicate that God would appear in human form.¹⁶ This is a crucial point in Wyschogrod's argument. In contrast to the fact that "während des ganzen Mittelalters [...] die Juden" conflicted "der hohen Christologie aus rationalen Gründen", Wyschogrod argues,

daß wir Gott nicht auf Grund unserer Vernunftwahrheiten vorschreiben können, was er tun kann und was nicht. [...] Wenn Juden die Inkarnation und die Trinität nicht anerkennen, dann nicht deshalb, weil sie rationaler denken als ihre christlichen Nachbarn, sondern weil ihre Offenbarungs-urkunden diese Lehren nicht enthalten.¹⁷

The term "Immanuel", "God with us" in Mt 1:23 could be interpreted as referring to an incarnation, but this reference to an Old Testament "prophecy" was linked to such a crude corruption of Isa 7:14¹⁸ that it should actually be the talk of the opposite of a "fulfillment". Moreover, the name "Immanuel" is not associated with Jesus anywhere else in the New Testament.

The other quotations from or allusions to Old Testament texts serve to present Jesus as the "Governor", as the "shepherd" (Mt 2:6; 26:31), as the "son" called out of Egypt (2:15), as "my beloved Son" (3:17), as a "great light" (4:16), as the one who "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (8:17), as the one who made the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers clean, the deaf hear, the dead rise and the poor hear the gospel (11:5), as "my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased" (12:18), as "King" of "the daughter of Sion" (21:5), but all these designations fall short of an interpretation of Jesus as the incarnate Word of God inspired and continued by the prologue to the Gospel of John.

4 At the End of the Beginning: "think 'otherwise'"¹⁹

The decisive factor for present and future Christian theologies is, on the one hand, the consideration of their possible toxicity, i.e. their potentially

16 For the sake of the brevity of this study, only passages from the Gospel of Matthew will be used below as examples.

17 Wyschogrod, *Christologie ohne Antijudaismus?*, p. 8.

18 The differences between Isa 7:14 and Mt 1:23 are well known. Apart from the incorrect or restrictive translation of מְלֶכֶה and the changed tenses of the verbs, the prophecy in Isa 7:14 is addressed to King Ahaz and contains no indication that this prophecy was only to be fulfilled seven centuries later.

19 "[...] I wish to suggest that one important task for Christian systematic theology is to think 'otherwise', 'in a 'more Jewish' manner' (Lowe, *The Intensification of Time*, p. 694 et seq.).

life-threatening or -extinguishing effects, and, on the other hand, the simple question to be answered according to all the sources available so far for the Judaism of his time: Would Jesus of Nazareth, as a Jew of the years around 0 to around 30 CE, have thought of himself in this way?

In my opinion, both questions are often not sufficiently considered “wo die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen christlicher Aufnahme” of Jewish “Kritik an der Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes (...) in der katholischen Theologie (...) bedacht werden”.²⁰ When, for example, Hans Hermann Henrix talks about the “bleibende Bedeutung” of the Council of Chalcedon’s understanding of Christ, “wenn christliche Theologie auf die jüdische Kritik an der Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes einzugehen versucht”,²¹ all those interpretative approaches to the person of Jesus of Nazareth that arose pre- and post-Chalcedonian, or in any case a- or anti-Chalcedonian, are (at least for the most part) left out. The (also verbal) recognition that Christian theologies in all centuries, even after the largely enforcement of the Chalcedonian approach, are always to be considered in the plural, can be a further helpful element for the development of non-anti-Jewish Christian interpretations of the person of Jesus.

According to Magnus Striet, the “Wirkungsgeschichte” of this person includes the fact “dass sich die Geister schon früh nach seinem Tod an ihm schieden. (...) Wer sich seiner Person im christlich-jüdischen Gespräch reflexiv vergewissert, darf diese Wirkungsgeschichte nicht unterschlagen” – namely that part of the history of his impact that led to “Gewalt gegen das jüdische Volk” “in einer sich immer weiter steigernden, an Grausamkeit nicht zu überbietenden Weise”.²² For Striet, this “theologische Antijudaismus” was “die historische Kehrseite einer bestimmten, satisfaktionstheoretisch konzipierten Soteriologie”. As a countermeasure, Striet proposes “sich zurückzugeben zum historischen Jesus und zugleich das neuzeitliche Freiheitsdenken zum normativen Grund theologischer Reflexion zu machen” which should open up “die Möglichkeit einer anderen Soteriologie” and the understanding of a Christianity “als dem Judentum immanent”.²³

As much as Striet’s endeavors represent a remarkable step in the further development of Christology, there are at the same time argumentative inconsistencies. It is only possible to give an outline of these here. On the one hand, Striet uses the term “historical Jesus” within his train of thought as something to be grasped; on the other hand, he states:

20 Henrix, *II. Inkarnation: Tiefster Glaubensunterschied und stärkstes Bindeglied*, p. 18.

21 Henrix, *II. Inkarnation: Tiefster Glaubensunterschied und stärkstes Bindeglied*, p. 19.

22 Striet, *Christliche Theologie im Angesicht des Judentums Jesu*, p. 72.

23 Striet, *Christliche Theologie im Angesicht des Judentums Jesu*, p. 74.

Einen Zugang zum historischen Jesus gibt es nur über Quellen, die bereits hochgradig theologisch interessiert sind. Ob sich in der historischen Rekonstruktionsarbeit wirklich der historische Jesus zeigt oder nicht, kann somit immer nur unter Vorbehalt angenommen werden.²⁴

In my opinion, it would be helpful here to take the literary figures of memory of the historical Jesus in the various Gospels, who each have different characteristics and who have been updated over the centuries, as the starting point for further considerations, in all their diversity and with all the necessary differentiation in the reflection.

On the other hand, the soteriology conceived in terms of satisfaction theory, which Striet would like to set aside with good reason and just as good arguments, is not to be located as the fundamental evil of the anti-Judaism of traditional Christologies, but rather the accusation of the murder of God against “the” Jews. However, Striet comes to the conclusion:

Ich glaube nicht, dass an dieser Stelle theologisch noch viel weiter zu kommen ist. Will man intellektuell redlich bleiben, so ist diese Dramatik innerhalb des einen Gottesvolkes von Juden und Christen nur noch auszuhalten und die eigene Interpretation Jesu als jeweils möglich zu riskieren. Menschen mit jüdischem Bekenntnis werden das Messias- beziehungsweise Christusbekenntnis nicht annehmen, und ebenso werden christlich glaubende Menschen daran festhalten, dass der Jude Jesus in einem einzigartigen Verhältnis zu Gott selbst gehört, ja mehr noch: Er nicht nur Gottes Willen geoffenbart hat, sondern die Selbstoffenbarung Gottes war.²⁵

However, it is precisely this confusion between the confession of Jesus as a Messiah (in whatever form) and Jesus as God that occurs in many so-called Christological drafts. One conceptual inconsistency is not taken into account thereby: according to the wording, “Christology” should deal with the Messiahship, but not with the divinity of Jesus. This alone would offer a great deal of scope for connecting with Jewish approaches, such as those of Wyschogrod.²⁶

24 Striet, *Christliche Theologie im Angesicht des Judeseins Jesu*, p. 94.

25 Striet, *Christliche Theologie im Angesicht des Judeseins Jesu*, p. 137 et seq.

26 Rosemary Ruether points out that Christology “was always the other side of anti-Judaism”. However, unlike Wyschogrod, she sees the confession of the Messiah as “the most fundamental affirmation of Christian faith”, on which “everything else in Christian theology is built” (Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 246).

“Die einfachste Lösung” of the problem of the “antijüdischen Antijudaismus”, which “in seinen bössartigeren Formen [...] eine Dämonisierung der Juden beinhalten kann”, would be according to Michael Wyschogrod, “die hohe Christologie aufzugeben und durch eine gemilderte Christologie zu ersetzen, die Jesus als einen ganz besonderen Menschen anerkennt, durch den Gottes Geist zur Menschheit redet, der aber nicht qualitativ von seinen prophetischen Vorläufern unterschieden ist”, because:

Diejenigen, die sich zu einer hohen Christologie bekennen [...], müssen die Möglichkeit anerkennen, daß diese Lehre der Geringschätzung Nahrung gibt. Vertreter einer hohen Christologie müssen deshalb besondere Anstrengungen unternehmen, das jüdische Volk nicht zu dämonisieren – es sei denn, ihr Glaube erfordert ein von Gott verworfenes Israel. Dann sollten sie allerdings nicht betonen, daß Jesus Jude war.²⁷

Alon Goshen-Gottstein put it in similar terms: “Die frühe jüdisch-christliche Christologie hätte die Grenze, Jesus als inkarnierten Gott anzuerkennen, niemals überschritten. Dieses Bekenntnis [...] verrät eine fundamental antijüdische Position. In letzter Konsequenz leugnet es Jesu Identität als Jude.”²⁸

However, the decisive question for developers of future non-anti-Jewish Christian theologies should not only be whether Jesus, as a Jew, may have thought of himself as the exclusive “Son of God” (i.e. not within the Jewish understanding of this term). The following statement by Goshen-Gottstein is far more important to consider and should not be disregarded in any

27 Wyschogrod, *Christologie ohne Antijudaismus?*, p. 9. In contrast, Josef Wohlmuth thinks: “Die ‘hohe Christologie’ muss nicht notwendigerweise antijüdisch verstanden werden” (Wohlmuth, *An der Schwelle zum Heiligtum*, p. 136 et seq.). Wohlmuth argues for “eine an der Kenosis orientierte Christologie, die mit Chalkedon durchaus nicht in Widerspruch steht” (Wohlmuth, *An der Schwelle zum Heiligtum*, p. 134), which focuses more on the “unmixed” than on the “undivided”. The “Unvermischbarkeit des Göttlichen und Menschlichen in Jesus von Nazareth, die im asynchytös festgehalten wird”, owes itself “in der chalkedonischen Christologie dem Judentum” (Wohlmuth, *Der jüdische Jesus*, p. 331). This thesis, developed in contrast to Daniel Boyarin, would have to be discussed in more detail elsewhere.

28 Goshen-Gottstein, *Das Judentum und die Inkarnationstheologie*, p. 252. Christian Rutishauser raised the following objection: “Goshen-Gottstein geht in seiner Interpretation, die Inkarnationstheologie leugne die Identität Jesu als Jude, sicherlich zu weit, denn die Betonung seines Menschseins spricht ja nicht gegen sein Judesein, sondern nimmt dieses in sich auf.” (Rutishauser, *Christlichen Glauben denken*, p. 132). This argument misses Goshen-Gottstein’s point insofar as, from a Jewish perspective, it is not the humanity of Jesus, believed to be the incarnated Son of God, but the attribution of divinity and his worship that is to be rejected.

deliberations: “Die Inkarnation besagt, dass Jesus Gott ist. Diese Lehre war der Grund für den Vorwurf des Gottesmordes, der über die Jahrhunderte hin gegen die Juden erhoben wurde. [...] Wäre die Inkarnationslehre nicht formuliert worden, wäre viel Leid vermieden worden [...]”²⁹

The development of non-anti-Jewish Christian theologies, especially in the area of soteriology, is therefore not a task to be carried out in the abstract, but one that must be done exclusively *en face*: *En face* of Jews of all pasts, the respective present and all futures, *en face* of all Jewish victims of Christian incarnation theologies and *en face* of a Jesus of Nazareth, who in all probability lived, thought and worked under completely different mental conditions than those attributed to him in the course of the following centuries.

Biography

Born 1980, currently a doctoral student at the University of Vienna, dissertation in the field of Fundamental Theology, on the topic “A theology of the Holy Saturday with special consideration of Jewish perspectives”; 2015–2020 studies in Catholic theology, previously completed degrees in composition, concert piano and music theory, doctorate in musicology, teaching at the University of Vienna, etc.

Bibliography

- Aland, Kurt: *Papyrus Bodmer II. Ein erster Bericht*, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 82 (3/1957), pp. 161–184.
- Augustyn, Wolfgang: *Inkarnationschristologie in den Bildkünsten des Mittelalters. Ein Beitrag zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Johannesprologs*, in: Irmtraud Fischer (ed.): *Der Streit um die Schrift* (= Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie, ed. by Irmtraud Fischer et al., Vol. 31). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2018, pp. 245–264.
- Collins, John J.: *Papyrus Bodmer II*, in: *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20 (3/1958), pp. 281–289.
- Fee, Gordon D.: *Papyrus Bodmer II (P66): Its Textual Relationships and Scribal Characteristics*, in: *Bodmer Papyri, Scribal Culture, and Textual Transmission. Collected Works on New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. by Eldon Jay Epp (= New Testament

29 Goshen-Gottstein, *Das Judentum und die Inkarnationstheologie*, p. 252.

- Tools, Studies and Documents, ed. by Bart D. Ehrman/Eldon J. Epp, Vol. 63), Leiden: Brill 2021, pp. 1–143.
- Fredriksen, Paula: *From Jesus to Christ. The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press 2000.
- Fredriksen, Paula: *The Birth of Christianity and the Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism*, in: Paula Fredriksen/Adele Reinhartz (eds.): *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism. Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*. Louisville (KY): Westminster John Knox Press 2002, pp. 8–30.
- Goshen-Gottstein, Alon: *Das Judentum und die Inkarnationstheologie*, in: *Freiburger Rundbrief*, N. F. 12 (4/2005), pp. 242–253.
- Henrix, Hans Hermann: *II. Inkarnation: Tiefster Glaubensunterschied und stärkstes Bindeglied*, in: Edward Kessler/Hans Hermann Henrix (eds.): *Gottes Gegenwart in Israel und die Inkarnation. Ein christlich-jüdischer Dialog*, in: *Freiburger Rundbrief* 15 (1/2008), pp. 16–25.
- Kobel, Esther: *Evangelium nach Johannes*, 2017, <https://bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/47922/> (Date of last Access: 24.10.2024).
- Levine, Amy-Jill: *The Misunderstood Jew. The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. San Francisco: HarperOne 2006.
- Lowe, Walter: *The Intensification of Time: Michael Wyschogrod and the Task of Christian Theology*, in: *Modern Theology* 22 (4/2006), pp. 693–699.
- Meyer, Barbara U.: *Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory. Theological and Philosophical Explorations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020.
- Neumann-Gorsolke, Ute: *Gottebenbildlichkeit (AT)*, 2017, <https://bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/19892/> (Date of last Access: 24.10.2024).
- Nongbri, Brent: *The Limits of Palaeographic Dating of Literary Papyri: Some Observations on the Date and Provenance of P. Bodmer II*, in: *Museum Helveticum. Schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft* 71 (1/2014), pp. 1–35.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford: *Faith and Fratricide. The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*. Eugene (OR): Wipf and Stock 1997.
- Rutishauser, Christian M.: *Christlichen Glauben denken. Im Dialog mit der jüdischen Tradition* (= Forum Christen und Juden, ed. by Erhard Blum et al., Vol. 15). Zürich: LIT Verlag 2016.
- Striet, Magnus: *Christliche Theologie im Angesicht des Judeseins Jesu*, in: Walter Homolka/Magnus Striet (eds.): *Christologie auf dem Prüfstand. Jesus der Jude – Christus der Erlöser*. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2019, pp. 71–140.
- Theobald, Michael: *Die Fleischwerdung des Logos. Studien zum Verhältnis des Johannesprologs zum Corpus des Evangeliums und zu 1 Joh* (= Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, ed. by Joachim Gnllka, Neue Folge, Vol. 20). Münster: Aschendorff 1988.
- Theobald, Michael: *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum* (= WUNT, ed. by Jörg Frey, Vol. 267). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010.

- Wohlmuth, Josef: *An der Schwelle zum Heiligtum. Christliche Theologie im Gespräch mit jüdischem Denken*. Paderborn/München/Wien: Ferdinand Schöningh 2007.
- Wohlmuth, Josef: *Der jüdische Jesus und die Christologie des Konzils von Chalkedon*, in: Christian Danz/Kathy Ehrensperger/Walter Homolka (eds.): *Christologie zwischen Judentum und Christentum*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020, pp. 319–332.
- Wyschogrod, Michael: *Christologie ohne Antijudaismus?*, in: *Kirche und Israel* 7 (1/1992), pp. 6–9.
- Wyschogrod, Michael: *Resurrection*, in: *Pro ecclesia* 1 (1/1992), pp. 104–112.
- Wyschogrod, Michael: *Incarnation*, in: *Pro ecclesia* 2 (2/1993), pp. 208–215.
- Wyschogrod, Michael: *Inkarnation aus jüdischer Sicht*, in: *Evangelische Theologie* 55 (1/1995), pp. 13–28.