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ANDREAS PANGRITZ

### **'Mystery and Commandment' in Leo Baeck and Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

In the major lecture on 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews' that Eberhard Bethge held in 1979 in Tübingen, he described Bonhoeffer's exceptional attitude towards the National Socialist persecution of the Jews, a stance that imposed political resistance and martyrdom. ' However, to expect Bonhoeffer to have provided a fully formulated or even outline 'theology after the Holocaust' would be anachronistic. But 'his life work has established some presuppositions for new approaches to a post-Holocaust theology which would come much later than his own time'. His most important achievement was 'his identification with the persecuted and murdered Jews in a deed' that was self-interpreting.<sup>1</sup> In response to Bethge's lecture, the American theologian William J. Peck notes that from the Jewish point of view the testimony of Bonhoeffer's life speaks a clearer language than his theology: 'Deeds must precede words.' Peck argues that Bonhoeffer 'took back' his earlier 'sentence about the curse laid on the name of the Jews, in the only way in which he could take it back, by entering into solidarity with the victims of the Holocaust through his death'.<sup>2</sup>

Bonhoeffer did not present a 'post-Holocaust theology'. However, 'from a Jewish perspective', according to Pinchas E. Lapide, he can be regarded as a 'pioneer and forerunner of a step-by-step re-Hebraisation of the Churches in our times'.<sup>3</sup> With Bethge, we discover a number of aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology that could indeed contribute to renewing the relationship between Christians and Jews.

In defining the relationship between 'theology and ethics', Bonhoeffer 'attacked and corrected the usual understanding of Christ's suspension of the law in the

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<sup>1</sup> Eberhard Bethge, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer und die Juden', in: *Konsequenzen. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Kirchenverständnis heute* (IBF), eds. E. Feil and I. Tödt, Munich 1980, 210; quoted from the English translation presented in 1980 at the III International Bonhoeffer Conference, University of Oxford; cf.: 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews', in: John D. Godsey and Geoffrey B. Kelly (eds.), *Ethical Responsibility: Bonhoeffer's Legacy to the Churches*, New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981 (Toronto Studies in Theology; v. 6), 90.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Peck, 'Response', in: *Ethical Responsibility*, 100.

<sup>3</sup> Pinchas E. Lapide, 'Bonhoeffer und das Judentum', in: E. Feil (ed.) *Verspieltes Erbe? Dietrich Bonhoeffer und der deutsche Nachkriegsprotestantismus* (IBF 2), Munich 1979, 129.

sense of finishing with the Torah'.<sup>4</sup> Bethge presents examples: 'Adherence to Christ', as Bonhoeffer writes in *The Cost of Discipleship*, 'also means adherence to the law of God'.<sup>5</sup> And in his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer emphasises the aspect of freedom and permission in the commandment: 'The commandment of God is permission. It differs from all human laws in that it commands freedom.'<sup>6</sup> Commenting on these notions, in which Bonhoeffer follows Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (II/2), Bethge writes: 'May be he was nearer to Jewish tradition than he knew himself'. In Bonhoeffer's theology we find, 'that vivid affinity to the notion of "the way" which is so centrally Jewish and so biblical. Not "the way" as a catechetical possession, but as concrete, real walking'. In this connection, Bethge stresses 'Bonhoeffer's frequently expressed wish to be able to write an interpretation of the lengthy Psalm 119, the Psalm which depicts the saving quality of the way', the Psalm of the love of the law, of the gospel within the commandment.<sup>7</sup>

Bethge also emphasises the progression in Bonhoeffer's use of the Old Testament. There is 'a development from an initial claiming of the Hebraic Bible to a readiness to be claimed by the Bible ... First Bonhoeffer read Christ in the Old Testament', thus defending the Hebrew Bible against the usual Christian theological derogation; 'at the end he tried to understand Christ only from the Old Testament'.<sup>8</sup> Bethge interprets Bonhoeffer's sermon on the occasion of his godson's baptism in May 1944 with the famous phrase about the future Christian life consisting in 'prayer and righteous action among men' as intimating a renunciation of the Christian mission to the Jews;<sup>9</sup> probably with good cause, though Bonhoeffer is not explicit. Rather he seems to suggest renunciation of the mission to the pagans or of the Christian mission as a whole.

Finally, Bethge draws attention to Bonhoeffer's image of the future Church in his 'Outline for a Book' from which he measures the extent to which Bonhoeffer 'was

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<sup>4</sup> E. Bethge, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews' in: *Ethical Responsibility*, 86.

<sup>5</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Trans. by R.H. Fuller, revised by Irmgard Booth, New York: Macmillan, 1963, 139.

<sup>6</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986, 281.

<sup>7</sup> E. Bethge, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews' in: *Ethical Responsibility*, 87f.

<sup>8</sup> E. Bethge, op. cit., 88; cf. Martin Kuske, *Das Alte Testament als Buch von Christus. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Wertung und Auslegung des Alten Testaments*, Göttingen 1971.

<sup>9</sup> E. Bethge, op. cit., 89; cf. D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison. The Enlarged Edition*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972, 300.

affected by the crisis in his church caused by the Holocaust. It was an epochal event which could in no sense be dismissed as a mere episode.' Therefore, 'his paragraphs about a future Gestalt of the church in that "Outline" ... sounded utopian' when first published. 'In spite of the declarations of guilt of Stuttgart (1945, and more specifically that of Weißensee (1950) ..., the church had soon made the Holocaust event just an episode.'<sup>10</sup>

Although there are elements in Bonhoeffer's theology that could prepare the future return of Christian theology to its Jewish roots, Bethge in his Tübingen lecture had to report a regrettable deficiency: 'The young Bonhoeffer ... did not establish links during the twenties with that Jewish revival which is so spectacular in its religious and philosophical meaning for us today, and which at that time was going on, so to speak, just around the corner, centring upon names such as Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Eugen Rosenstock, and Leo Baeck.'<sup>11</sup>

Bethge mentions other 'blind spots' in Bonhoeffer's life and theology. He notes that Bonhoeffer had 'never studied the Talmud', and that he now and again 'thoughtlessly perpetuated damaging stereotypes of the Jews', indicating his lack of knowledge of Judaism. 'Bonhoeffer never considered to what extent theology and church history had prepared the way for anti-Semitism with their theological anti-Judaism.' Throughout his life, 'for Bonhoeffer there were never genuine, living, Jewish partners for dialogue'.<sup>12</sup>

However, this lack of communication does not nullify what Bethge regards as the essential: 'His contribution to the dialogue was made in Flossenbürg ... The question put to him was the killing of the Jews. His answer was his own death. But it is exactly this kind of dialogue, sealed forever, which makes Bonhoeffer for us today a pioneering figure for a "post-Holocaust theology". But this theology has to be formulated by us, not him.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> E. Bethge, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews' in: *Ethical Responsibility*, 89f.

<sup>11</sup> E. Bethge, op. cit., 52.

<sup>12</sup> E. Bethge, op. cit., 90f.

<sup>13</sup> E. Bethge, op. cit., 91f. - There is one detail Bethge does not mention. In his 'Christmas letter' to Eberhard Bethge (Advent IV, 1943) Bonhoeffer writes that he had 'conceived a plan to travel' to Palestine with Eberhard 'after the war. It seems that one only gets something out of it as a theologian; for the laity too much of it is a disappointment. We'll take our wives to Italy and leave them there to wait for us' (*Letters and Papers*, 171).

The fact that Bonhoeffer seemed to be scarcely aware of the theological movement among his Jewish contemporaries is all the more unfortunate because the observer of today can discern substantive links between the Jewish thinking of the twenties and thirties and Bonhoeffer's renewal of Protestant theology. For instance there was Bonhoeffer's personalistic ecclesiology in his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*, which shows close substantive affinity with Martin Buber's 'I and Thou' philosophy without any demonstrable direct influence.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, at the 1988 5th International Bonhoeffer Conference in Amsterdam, Albert H. Friedlander pointed out a certain affinity between Bonhoeffer's thinking and the polarity of 'mystery and commandment' in Leo Baeck, albeit without going into greater detail.<sup>15</sup> In his biography of Leo Baeck, Friedlander mentions Bonhoeffer at one juncture as evidence that the theological tradition of Lutheranism must be seen in a more differentiated light than in Baeck's polemic.<sup>16</sup> It seems worthwhile examining more closely what Bonhoeffer could have learned from his older contemporary had he been aware of him.

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<sup>14</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio. Eine dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche* (1927/30), edited by J.v. Soosten (DBW 1), Munich 1986; cf. Martin Buber, *Das dialogische Prinzip*, Heidelberg (4th editions), 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Albert H. Friedlander, 'Israel and Europe', in: *Bonhoeffer's Ethics. Old Europe and New Frontiers*, eds. G. Carter et al., Kampen 1991, 117: 'Baeck's teaching of classical religion against romantic religion, his vision of the commandment which leads to the mystery, of the mystery out of which the commandment must emerge, parallels the vision of Bonhoeffer.'

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Albert H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt*, New York/Chicago/San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968, 271: 'Baeck was harshest - and unfair in a number of ways - in his attacks upon Luther ... But the attack rests not only upon Luther's teachings, but upon the way these teachings have evidenced themselves in the life of the German community. The life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer indicates that Lutheran life can be righteous testimony; but it is not a full answer to Baeck...' Cf. also 197, note 37: 'The moral failures of the Church loom larger than the successes. Baeck predicted the failures; he also expected the moral greatness of men like Bonhoeffer who would respond to the commandment of Christianity which could not but shine through its sometimes obscuring mystery.'

Much separates the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer from Rabbi Leo Baeck, his senior by a generation. But they also have much in common, both biographically and theologically.

Both Leo Baeck and Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to Berlin from Breslau. Baeck was born in Lissa on 23 May 1873, the son of a rabbi. He began his studies in Breslau at the rather traditionalist Jewish Theological Seminary and at Breslau University, moving to Berlin the summer of 1894 to the liberal Institute for the Science of Judaism and at the Friedrich Wilhelm University. He wrote his doctoral thesis on Baruch Spinoza at the Berlin University under the supervision of the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, whose 'philosophy of life' was to play an important part in Baeck's thinking.<sup>17</sup> In 1912 Baeck became a teacher of midrash and homiletics at the Berlin Institute for the Science of Judaism.<sup>18</sup>

It was in this same year that Dietrich Bonhoeffer arrived in Berlin, aged six, with his family. He had been born in Breslau, where his father was a professor for psychiatry and neurology. He subsequently accepted a chair at Berlin University. In 1927 Bonhoeffer took his doctoral degree with a dissertation on an ecclesiological subject (*Sanctorum Communio*). His supervisor was the theologian Reinhold Seeberg. He, too, was later to be influenced by the 'philosophy of life' when, half a century after Baeck, he discovered Dilthey during his incarceration at Tegel. Dilthey's work *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation* (*Weltanschauung and Analysis of Man Since the Renaissance and the Reformation*) gave impetus to the revolutionary theological thinking he developed in prison.<sup>19</sup>

Loyalty to Prussia and the Prussian 'idea' that perished in the First World War can also be seen as a measure of common ground between Baeck and Bonhoeffer. Baeck apparently shared Hermann Cohen's, 'fervent patriotism for the Prussian

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. H. Friedlander, op. cit. 19-22.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. A. H. Friedlander, op. cit. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer's letter to E. Bethge (2 Feb. 1944): 'I really wanted to become thoroughly familiar with the nineteenth century in German. I'm now feeling particularly the need of a good working knowledge of Dilthey ...' (D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison. The Enlarged Edition*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge, new York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1972, 204), which he was finally able to obtain. Cf. Ernst Feil, *Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers. Hermeneutik, Christologie, Weltverständnis*, Munich/Mainz 1971, 355ff. (Der Einfluß Wilhelm Diltheys auf 'Widerstand und Ergebung').

State'.<sup>20</sup> In a section of his *Ethics* devoted to the theology of history ('Inheritance and Decay', 1940/41), Bonhoeffer still praises the Prussian conception of the State as opposed to both modern nationalism and internationalism.<sup>21</sup> Baeck's view of Prussia is more ambivalent. He praised Prussia as the home of Kantian philosophy and Enlightenment while criticising it for the authoritarian and state-church tradition of Prussian Lutheranism: 'The tutelary police state is the direct descendant of Lutheranism'.<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer, too, never tired of denouncing 'pseudo-Lutheranism' and the fallacious distinction it drew between the 'profane' and 'spiritual' kingdom (cf. *Ethics*, 196, 254 and 256). In participating in the conspiracy against Hitler, he, too came to understand that the German with his ideology of obedience and sacrifice, 'still lacked something fundamental: could not see the need for free and responsible action, even in opposition to his task and his calling', in short, he was deficient in 'civil courage' (*Letters and Papers*, 6). However, it was only during his time in prison that Bonhoeffer seems to have become aware of Baeck's perception that there was an intrinsic link between Lutheran tradition and the authoritarian State: 'Our "Protestant" (not Lutheran) Prussian world has been so dominated by the four mandates' - marriage, work, State, and Church, which according to Bonhoeffer all fall within the 'sphere of obedience' - 'that the sphere of freedom has receded into the background'.<sup>23</sup>

Bonhoeffer and Baeck share a common ambiguity in their loyalty to Germany as the locus of responsibility still under the conditions of the Nazi State. In the thirties, both Bonhoeffer and Baeck had had the opportunity to emigrate to the United States. Both returned shortly before the outbreak of war.<sup>24</sup> Both Baeck and

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<sup>20</sup> A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 101: 'No political unit has ever been more alien and indeed hostile to nationalism than was Prussia. Prussia was a state, but not a nation ... Prussia viewed the German national cause with profound suspicion ... Prussia had a sound instinctive sense of the revolutionary implications of the notion of nationhood, and refused to accept them ... Nationalism evokes the countermovement of internationalism. The two are equally revolutionary. To both of these movements Prussia opposed the state. Prussia wished to be neither nationalistic nor international ...'

<sup>22</sup> L. Baeck, 'Heimgegangene des Krieges. Über den preussischen Staat (1917); quoted by A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, Letter to E. Bethge, 23 January 1944; *Letters and Papers*, 193.

<sup>24</sup> On Baeck cf. A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck, Leben und Lehre*, Munich, Chr. Kaiser, 1990 (Kaiser TB 84), 63 and 279, note 8: 'There is sufficient evidence that Baeck was invited to the United States and could have left Germany without difficulty ... Professor Baron ... reports a number of conversations with Baeck during which Baeck stated the "he could

Bonhoeffer have been reproached for having returned to their 'duties'. Would emigration not have been the clearer decision? In view of the struggle and suffering that the return to Germany caused Baeck and Bonhoeffer, it is inappropriate to judge their decision from the sidelines. Both of them were fully aware of and accepted the ambivalence of their move.

For Bonhoeffer the return to Germany meant participation in the political resistance against Hitler. The persecution of the Jews can be regarded as a crucial motive since Bonhoeffer had spoken out against their legal discrimination from the outset in 1933.<sup>25</sup> In retrospect, *'After Ten Years'* (1942), Bonhoeffer describes the imperatives of the conspiracy: 'We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use?' (*Letters and Papers*, 16).

The situation was even more hopeless for Baeck. He had had to face up to the ambiguity of the struggle within Nazi Germany as early as 1933, when, as the undisputed spokesman of German Jewry, he was elected President of the 'Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland' (National Agency of Jews in Germany): 'There was no way for the Jewish community to win its battle against the Nazis. They had been part of the democratic opposition to National Socialism; but that had been destroyed in 1933. There was no help from the outside. Any resistance had to come from the Jewish group, from within itself... The main work of the Reichsvertretung which Baeck headed was the task of slowing down the inevitable... Baeck could not address himself to the decent elements of the German community; they were given little voice in the government. He could not argue his case in public; it had been decided to burn the Jews. Instead, time and

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not abandon his flock". professor Abraham Heschel also describes an encounter he had with Baeck on the Sunday before the war was declared ...' (passage and note are lacking in the original English version). On Bonhoeffer see his letter to Reinhold Niebuhr (June 1939): 'I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany ...' in: *A Testament to Freedom. The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, New York / San Francisco: Harper, 1990, 504.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. D. Bonhoeffer, 'The Church and the Jewish Question' (April 1933), in: *A Testament to Freedom*, 137-140.



again, he had to enter the mouth of the lion, going to Gestapo headquarters and arguing tenaciously for an extension of time, for a milder form of anti-Jewish legislation than what was being promulgated.<sup>26</sup>

The close biographical links between Baeck and Bonhoeffer are particularly evident in the phase in which Bonhoeffer joined the political resistance. Despite all the difficulties facing Jewish defensive action, Baeck established contact with representatives of the resistance movement during the period when Bonhoeffer was involved in the conspiracy against Hitler. While Bonhoeffer, in late 1942, elaborated a preliminary draft for the resistance group headed by Colonel General Beck of emergency measures to be taken by the Church after the overthrow of the regime and a pastoral announcement and well as a letter to the clergy,<sup>27</sup> Baeck, on the urging of his contacts, composed a 'Manifesto to the German People' (the text of which has been lost) for 'The Day After'.<sup>28</sup>

After Baeck had himself been deported to Theresienstadt in 1943, he was confronted by the ethical dilemma whether he ought to remain silent on what he knew about Auschwitz. In deciding to keep silent, he accepted coming under moral suspicion.<sup>29</sup> However, according to Albert Friedlander, 'the historical question is difficult to judge'. In a situation where 'the possibility of life and death were not influenced in a substantial way by the actions of the Jews caught by the

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<sup>26</sup> A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. D. Bonhoeffer, 'Beendigung des Kirchenkampfes', in: GS II, 433ff.; cf. also 438ff.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck. Leben und Lehre*, Munich 1990, 57. Friedlander refers to Hans Reichmann, 'The Fate of a Manuscript', in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book III*, 1958, 361f. Reichmann cites from memory a conversation with Leo Baeck at his home in London (6 August 1955: 'One day ... I shall perhaps write about my co-operation with the German Resistance... The importance of this movement should not be underestimated. I was in constant touch with the men of the Resistance, my contact being a well-known industrialist in Stuttgart, whose name I should prefer not to mention without his permission. This gentleman had connections both with Goerdeler and the Army... My industrialist contact told me people realised that the time for the assumption of power would have to be carefully prepared in the press and by writers. A manifesto to the German people was to be issued. Among others I had been requested to draft such a document and my contact informed me that my version for 'The Day After' had been chosen.' The Stuttgart industrialist can be identified as Robert Bosch (cf. Ger van Roon, *Widerstand im Dritten Reich*, Munich<sup>2</sup> 1981, 140f).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Paul Tillich's comment as reported by Albert Friedlander: 'In a way, I would criticise Baeck for not giving the last iota of information which he possessed. If he did know that Auschwitz meant certain death, he should have spoken out. The full existential truth should always be made available, just as the incurable patient should always be told the full truth' (cit. A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck*, 47).

Nazi trap', it is 'the motive for the action and not the result that matters... Certainly, Baeck's decision to say nothing was a deeply moral act, dictated by his concern for his fellow men.'<sup>30</sup>

Bonhoeffer would have shared this view, as the fragmentary essay 'Telling the Truth', which he started in prison, shows: "'Telling the truth" ... is not solely a matter of moral character; it is also a matter of correct appreciation of real situations and of serious reflection upon them... it is only the cynic who claims "to speak the truth" at all times and in all places to all men in the same way, but who, in fact, displays nothing but a lifeless image of the truth.'<sup>31</sup>

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Having only touched on theological aspects in our discussion of the biographical differences and similarities between Baeck and Bonhoeffer, we now address them directly. Baeck had established a reputation, especially with his book *Das Wesen des Judentums (The Essence of Judaism)* (1905, 2nd revised edition 1922) before Bonhoeffer was born. This work was the most prominent Jewish response to the famous series of lectures *Das Wesen des Christentums (The Essence of Christianity)*, held by Bonhoeffer's later teacher Adolf von Harnack in the winter semester of 1899/1900. It had been published in 1900. In contradiction to Harnack, who depicts Jesus as markedly distinct from the Jewish world, and sees in Jesus the decisive break in history, Baeck emphasises the unbroken continuity of the Jewish religion, which in the true knowledge of God also gives its adherents the knowledge of what is to be done.

As early as 1901 in an essay in the 'Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums', Baeck had criticised Harnack's liberal reductionism. As Friedlander puts it: 'Baeck felt that the emphasis on the "inner" aspects of the kingdom of God within Jesus' teachings and the exclusion of other elements found in Jesus and his contemporaries all made something Harnack should call "my

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<sup>30</sup> A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck*, 47f.

<sup>31</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, 'What is Meant by "Telling the Truth"?', in: *Ethics*, 364-366.

Christianity", but not "the essence of Christianity". Harnack replaced the climate of opinion of Jesus' days - the anguish of messianic days, asceticism, and apocalypticism - with the rational climate of Harnack's days; and the teachings of Jesus were selected in terms of the modern climate.<sup>132</sup> Baeck's intention is quite clearly to bring Jesus 'home' to Judaism. He writes: 'Jesus is a genuine Jewish personality; all of his striving and acting, his bearing and feeling, his speech and his silence bear the stamp of the Jewish manner, the imprint of Jewish idealism, the best of what Judaism gave and gives, but what only existed, at that time, in Judaism. He was a Jew among Jews.'<sup>133</sup>

From Baeck's point of view, the decisive problem was not Harnack's 'lack of knowledge of the Jewish sources', but a prejudice in methodology: 'The history of New Testament times had been isolated, set apart in time; the history itself was to be the essence of the Christian faith. It was itself unique and absolute. The Jewish history which preceded it could not be taken seriously, lest it challenge that uniqueness.'<sup>134</sup>

However, Friedlander points out that the vehemence of the debate 'within the liberal camp' did not obscure the fact that Harnack and Baeck 'shared more likenesses than differences'.<sup>135</sup> To this extent, Baeck's *Das Wesen des Judentum*, which appeared in 1905, was 'more than a challenge to Harnack's *Essence of Christianity*. It can be seen as a parallel development to it. Both works share the language and thought of the turn of the century; both emphasise the ethical act as the center of religious life and draw away from religious metaphysics... The quest for the essence of religion determined the nature of both works. it was part of the *Zeitgeist*...'<sup>136</sup>

Bonhoeffer seems to have taken as little notice of the book as did other Protestant theologians of his time. Only in his lecture on 'Systematic Theology of the

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<sup>32</sup> A. H. Friedlander *Leo Baeck*, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Leo Baeck, 'Harnacks Vorlesungen über das Wesen des Christenthums' (2nd revised and annotated edition, Breslau 1902; translated and cited according to : A. H. Friedlander, *Leo Baeck*, 58.

<sup>34</sup> A. H. Friedlander *Leo Baeck*, 59f.

<sup>35</sup> A. H. Friedlander, op. cit., 27.

<sup>36</sup> A. H. Friedlander, op. cit., 62. - Cf. 27: 'From Ritschl and Schleiermacher they had inherited the tendency to stress the immanence of God, whether in man or in nature.'

Twentieth Century' given in the winter semester 1931/32 does he make a remark in dealing with Harnack's 'Wesen des Christentums' that could apply to the common 'religious liberalism' of Baeck and Harnack: 'According to Harnack, Jesus basically brought nothing new that went beyond Judaism. This is why the book was warmly welcomed by Jews at the time: it provided a basis on which Jews and Christians could meet.'<sup>37</sup> Baeck's book could have interested Bonhoeffer, who, especially after the fateful year of 1933, was more and more concerned with the 'concreteness of the commandment' and was unable to find satisfaction in the conclusion that 'We don't know what we should do'. But, as Bethge remarks in 'Bonhoeffer and the Jews': 'In contrast to the fame of Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentums* ... was the neglect accorded to Leo Baeck's special way of joining the debate with his *Wesen des Judentums*.'<sup>38</sup>

Baeck contrasted Judaism as the 'classical religion of the act' with Christianity as the 'romantic religion of emotion'.<sup>39</sup> The Jewish religion knows no dogma; redemption does not depend on the possession of religious knowledge. Whilst Christianity yearns for redemption, Judaism endeavours to improve the world. Under the influence of his study of Jewish mysticism, Baeck was later to see the essence of Judaism 'in a dialectical confrontation of mystery and commandment'. This anticipates the dialectic of 'arcane' and 'worldliness' in Bonhoeffer's theology of the letters from prison. With the aid of Baeck's essay 'Mystery and Commandment', which he originally gave at a meeting of the Society for Free Philosophy in Darmstadt in 1922,<sup>40</sup> we will examine this a little more closely.

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<sup>37</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Die systematische Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts* 81931/32), in: *Gesammelte Schriften* V, 200; cf. also op. cit., 199f and 201.

<sup>38</sup> Eberhard Bethge, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews', in: *Ethical Responsibility*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> On this distinction and its connotations - Judaism as the religion of responsible adults and Christianity as the religion of fervent adolescents - see Bonhoeffer's reference to an 'adult' worldliness: 'In contrast to an 'adolescent' or 'immature person', who is 'never wholly in one place', a 'fully grown man' lives in a 'wholeness ...', which enables him to face an existing situation squarely' (letter to E. Bethge [19 March 1944], *Letters and Papers*, 233). On possible feminist critique of the masculinity ideal this represents, see H. Kuhlmann, 'Die Ethik Dietrich Bonhoeffers - Quelle oder Hemmschuh für feministisch-theologische Ethik?', in: *Zeitschr. f. evang. Ethik* 37 81993), 106-120).

<sup>40</sup> Leo Baeck, 'Geheimnis und Gebot', in: *Der Leuchter: Weltanschauung und Lebensgestaltung*. Jahrbuch der Schule der Weisheit, ed. Count H. Keyserling, Vol. 3 (Darmstadt 1921-22); cited according to the English version: 'Mystery and Commandment', in: Leo Baeck, *Judaism and Christianity* (1958), translated with an introduction by Walter Kaufmann, Philadelphia (The Jewish Publication Society of America)<sup>2</sup>1960, 171-185.

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The essay 'Mystery and Commandment' assumes 'two experiences of the human soul in which the meaning of his life takes on for a man a vital significance: the experience of mystery and the experience of commandment' (171). Baeck quotes a pivotal sentence in Deuteronomy in support of this polarity: 'That which is concealed belongs unto the Lord our God, but that which is revealed belongs unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this Torah' (Deut. 29, 29). We could also describe this duality as that of humanity's relationship with God and with the world, of faith and ethics. Baeck goes on to describe the 'twofold experience' as one of 'humility and reverence', where 'humility' signifies religion as what Schleiermacher calls a 'feeling of absolute dependency', whilst reverence - with a possible allusion to Albert Schweitzer - refers to ethics as respect for other life. But, according to Baeck, the peculiarity of Judaism is 'that these two experiences have here become one, and are experienced as one, in a perfect unity'. For: 'from the one God come both mystery and commandment, as one from the One, and the soul experiences both as one', so that 'all faith' means and suggests also 'the law, and all law, faith' (173).

Discussing the Lutheran tradition of 'sola fide' (by faith alone), Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses similar views in his 1937 work *The Cost of Discipleship* 'Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.'<sup>41</sup> He was not aware of his affinity with Baeck. But it is hardly surprising at that period that this formulation earned him the reproach of 'Judaisation or of a relapse into Jewish 'legalism'. This 'unity of mystery and commandment 'in the human soul constitutes Jewish piety and Jewish wisdom' according to Baeck. The consequence for him is that 'Judaism lacks any foundation for the conflict between transcendence and immanence'. For Jewish piety 'there is no such thing as this world without any beyond, nor a beyond without this world; no world to come

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<sup>41</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller, revised by Irmgard Booth. New York [Macmillan] 1963, 69. -

without the present world, and no human world without that which transcends it' (174).

This, too, calls to mind similar formulations by Bonhoeffer, this time in his posthumous *Widerstand und Ergebung (Letters and Papers from Prison)*: 'God is beyond in the midst of our life... that is how it is in the Old Testament, and in this sense we still read the New Testament far too little in the light of the Old', he writes in the very first 'theological letter' smuggled out of prison (30 April, 1944).<sup>42</sup> And again: 'What is above this world is, in the gospel, intended to exist *for* this world' (5 May, 1944).<sup>43</sup> A day after the failed coup d'état against Hitler, he writes of 'the profound this-worldliness of Christianity': 'I don't mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness, characterised by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection' (21 July, 1944).<sup>44</sup>

What is meant is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the transcendent root from which Christians in the world live. Baeck could naturally not have written this. Nevertheless, the structural affinity is striking. Bonhoeffer could have learnt - and we *can* learn -, that Jewish piety has nothing to do with 'legalism'. It is the expression of a 'profound this-worldliness'.

Leo Baeck stresses that in Judaism 'any opposition between mysticism and ethics has no place'. 'In Judaism, all ethics has its mysticism and all mysticism its ethics... All absorption in the profundity of God is always also an absorption in the will of God and His commandment. And all Jewish ethics is distinguished by being an ethic of revelation... it is the tidings of the divine' (175). Furthermore, 'Judaism ceases where the mood of devotion, that which is at rest and restful, would mean everything; where faith is content with itself, content with mystery... The religion of mere passivity, devoid of commandments, is no longer Judaism. Nor is Judaism to be found where the commandment is content with itself and is nothing but commandment... The religion of mere activity without devotion - this religion which becomes an ethic of the surface, or no more than the custom of the

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<sup>42</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison. The Enlarged Edition*, edited by E. Bethge, New York [Macmillan] 1972, 282.

<sup>43</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., 286.

<sup>44</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., 369.

day - is not Judaism. The world of Judaism is to be found only where faith has its commandment, and the commandment its faith' (176f.).

Again one can find structurally related thoughts in Bonhoeffer when he writes of an 'arcane discipline', a commitment of divine mystery that makes 'true worldliness' possible in the first place.<sup>45</sup> In other words, in the 'Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism' of his grand-nephew written in prison in May 1944: 'Our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among men.'<sup>46</sup> Baeck expresses a similar view with regard to Judaism: 'Jewish piety and Jewish wisdom are found only where the soul is in possession of ... the unity of devotion and deed... The commandment is a true commandment only because it is rooted in mystery, and the mystery is a true mystery because the commandment always speaks out of it' (178).

The similarity of what Bonhoeffer describes in the 'Baptismal Letter' as the future essence of being Christian with what Baeck describes as the essence of Judaism is so great that one is not surprised to find Baeck stating: 'The gospel - that old gospel which had not yet been adapted for the use of the Church and made to oppose Judaism - was still wholly a part of Judaism and conformed to the Old Testament... A full understanding of Jesus and his gospel is possible only in the perspective of Jewish thought and feeling and therefore perhaps only for a Jew' (177).

Furthermore, Baeck sees the 'commandment of God' as one 'that leads into the future... It contains a promise, it has a life that continually comes to life, it has a messianic aspect' (179f.). The commandment thus goes beyond 'righteous action'. It contains - in the terms of Bonhoeffer's 'Baptismal Letter' - a 'waiting for God's own time'.<sup>47</sup> However, the promissory nature of the commandment should not be confused with withdrawal from the world or from the present. Baeck accordingly specifies the messianic element in the commandment as God's 'lasting covenant with man'. 'Religion is not, in our case, a faith in redemption from the world and its demands, but rather - and this has often been called the realism of Judaism -

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. my essay 'Aspekte der "Arkandisziplin" bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer', in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 119, 1994, 755-768.

<sup>46</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 300.

<sup>47</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *ibid.*

trust in the world of, to be more precise, the assurance of reconciliation... Reconciliation is the liberating assurance that even now, during our life on earth, while we are coping with what is given and assigned, we are related to God' (180). 'Redemption here is not redemption from the world, but in the world, consecration of the world, realisation of the kingdom of God' (181).

Here, too, we find an exact parallel in Bonhoeffer, which sounds as if he had read Baeck. On 27 June 1944, he wrote to Eberhard Bethge: 'Now for some further thoughts about the Old Testament. Unlike the other oriental religions, the faith of the Old Testament isn't a religion of redemption. It's true that Christianity has always been regarded as a religion of redemption. But isn't this a cardinal error, which separates Christ from the Old Testament and interprets him in the lines of the myths about redemption? To the objection that a crucial importance is given in the Old Testament to redemption... it may be answered that the redemptions referred to here are *historical*, i.e. on *this* side of death, whereas everywhere else the myths about redemption are concerned to overcome the barrier of death. Israel is delivered out of Egypt so that it may live before God as God's people on earth... The decisive factor is said to be that in Christianity the hope of resurrection is proclaimed, and that that means the emergence of a genuine religion of redemption, the main emphasis now being on the far side of the boundary drawn by death. But it seems to me that this is just where the mistake and the danger lie... The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and the mythological hope is that the former sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way... This world must not be prematurely written off; in this the Old and New Testament are one.<sup>148</sup> This passage is interesting not least of all because Bonhoeffer gives us a glimpse of his working methods. He hadn't read Leo Baeck, but the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. And he becomes aware of how far Christianity has departed from its roots by moving away itself from the Bible of the Jews. But a New Testament taken out of this context could only be misunderstood in an anti-Jewish direction.

This is the background to Bonhoeffer's notorious critique of religion: 'Faith' for Bonhoeffer is 'something whole, involving the whole of one's life', whereas the

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<sup>48</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., 336f.



'religious act' seems to him to be 'something partial'. However, Jesus 'calls men, not to a new religion, but to life'.<sup>49</sup> 'To be a Christian', therefore, 'does not mean to be religious in a particular way..., but to be a human being... It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life.'<sup>50</sup> Thus he wrote in the last letter to Eberhard Bethge before the failed coup d'état on 18 June 1944.

In contrast to Bonhoeffer, Leo Baeck had not chosen to abandon the term 'religion' for Judaism. But his understanding of it is in accord with what Bonhoeffer referred to as 'non-religious Christianity'. Baeck writes: 'Thus religion is everything here. It permeates the whole of life... Religion here is nothing isolated, nothing that is shut off; it does not exist only alongside our life or only under or above our life. There is no mystery outside of life and no life outside the commandment' (181). 'And all thinking of God and searching for God, too, places us in the midst of life... In Judaism the attempt has been made to give life its style by causing religion to invade every day and penetrate the whole of everyday' (182).<sup>51</sup>

The other side of the coin is the sanctification of the everyday world: 'There is nothing left that could be called mere 'world', and nothing set aside as basically merely 'everyday'; there is no mere prose of existence' (181). 'Everything is in a sense divine service and has its mood and its dignity.' Judaism 'does not lead man out of his everyday world, but relates him to God within it' (182). Baeck makes this clear with reference to the Sabbath: 'It is ... the recreation in which the soul, as it were, creates itself again and catches its breath of life... The Sabbath is the image of the messianic; it proclaims the creation and the future... A life without Sabbath would lack the spring of renewal.' The Sabbath renders people 'different' among human beings. This recalls what Bonhoeffer somewhat misleadingly

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<sup>49</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., 362.

<sup>50</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., 361.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. also Leo Baeck, 'Bedeutung der jüdischen Mystik für unsere Zeit' ('The Significance of Jewish Mysticism for Our Time') (Die Tat, 1923), in: id.: *Wege im Judentum* 1933, 96f: 'All other mysticism seeks in essence to reveal salvation from the will... Its greatest yearning is ... the redemption of mankind from itself, the death of everything that lives... The particularity of Jewish mysticism, in contrast to this mysticism of dying, this passive redemption mysticism, is that it wishes to be a mysticism of life. It is a mysticism of the will and its reconciliation, of the commandment and its realisation, an active mysticism. It, too, has the peculiarity of Judaism that the act is decisive.'

describes in *The Cost of Discipleship* as the 'right unworldliness' of Christians. Baeck puts the issue more clearly than Bonhoeffer: 'Whoever experiences mystery and commandment becomes unique among men, different, an individual within the world... Whoever experiences both, both in unity, lives in the world and yet is different...' (184). It is perhaps for this reason the 'historic task' of Judaism, 'to offer this image of the dissenter, who dissents for humanity's sake'. In contrast to the other great world religions, 'the distinctive feature of Judaism ... (is) the power to liberate and renew, this messianic energy' (185). A Christianity that, in the footsteps of Bonhoeffer, was once again to take cognisance of its Jewish roots would have a lesson to learn from such non-conformity in the world.

Despite the affinity between Bonhoeffer's theology, especially of the *Letters from Prison* and the thinking of Leo Baeck, an important difference must be stressed: Bonhoeffer's later theology is consciously in conflict with his tradition, in conflict with the tradition of western Christendom, whilst Baeck's thinking is in his own tradition, in the tradition of Judaism, which he attempts to elucidate for Jews and non-Jews alike. For Christian theology the situation has not changed fundamentally since. Bonhoeffer's thinking, which could lead to the 're-Hebraisation' of Christian theology remains non-conformist.

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In conclusion: if it was possible for a Jewish rabbi and a Protestant theologian in the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany to develop a similar line of thought largely independently of each other, this indicates that there can be no question of 'German-Jewish symbiosis'. Nevertheless, the great substantive contiguity of Leo Baeck and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, all the more astonishing in the absence of any direct influence, can provoke conjecture that, in the social climate of the Weimar Republic, more 'cultural osmosis' was possible than we have been willing to believe since the Holocaust. For example, the 'Jewish renaissance' of the twenties and dialectical theology could possibly be seen as parallel developments triggered by a largely common societal experience.

On the other hand, it is perhaps not insignificant that Leo Baeck was a Jewish scholar who kept an attentive eye on developments within Protestant theology, perhaps learning more from them than he was willing to admit against the background of his anti-Protestantism polemics.<sup>52</sup>

A third aspect, however, is more cogent. Bonhoeffer develop the disquietingly new theology of the Letters from Prison without knowledge of Leo Baeck's theological works, without living Jewish interlocutors, and without an intimate knowledge of the Talmud. This indicates that the anticipated 're-Hebraisation' of Church and Theology is no alienation of Christian tradition: precisely a true understanding of the Reformational slogan 'Back to the sources!' leads to a renewal of Christian-Jewish relationship and thus to the self-knowledge of the Church. In hoping to 'be of some help for the Church's future'<sup>53</sup> Bonhoeffer, without explicit intention and without full awareness, made a contribution to renewing Christian-Jewish relations.

And what is our position today? When Christians seek a new relationship with Israel and are willing to hear Jewish teachers like Leo Baeck, they can rediscover the essence of the Church in the polarity of 'mystery and commandment', and learn to fulfil their task in the world.

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<sup>52</sup> An indication in this direction is given in Baeck's 1932 essay on 'Theology and History', in which he attempts to develop a concept of 'Jewish theology' precisely in confrontation with the 'dialectical theology' of the twenties. Cf. Leo Baeck, 'Theologie und Geschichte', in: *idem.*, *Aus drei Jahrtausenden. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen und Abhandlungen zu Geschichte des jüdischen Glaubens* (1938, Tübingen 1958, 28-41; English translation: 'Theology and History', transl. by M. Meyer, in: *Judaism*, Summer 1964, 274-285.

<sup>53</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 383.