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MISSION AMONG THE JEWS

A. van de Beek¹

ABSTRACT

The author discusses whether the issue of mission among the Jews deals with the basic question of mission or whether it is the core of the Christian faith. Although both Jews and Christians reject the idea and (more so) mission among the Jews, the author strongly argues for its need, for mission is not the expansion of ideas or cultures, but the telling of the good news of Christ's death and resurrection. Religion is not based on a doctrine but on an event that must be communicated to all and, first, to the people of God. The first people to do so were Jewish Christians. When Gentile Christians are called to proclaim the gospel to the Jews, they can do so only on the common ground of the Scriptures: the Old Testament. This requires knowledge of the Old Testament that is compatible with the Jewish knowledge of the Scriptures, which must be living letters of Christ as a result of the fullness of the gospel in their lives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mission among the Jews seems to be an outdated topic. For many centuries this was not the priority of the church. Conflicts and persecutions rather than mission were the issue. After the events of the last century, it was believed that Christians should be silent about mission to the Jews as most Christians were silent during the Holocaust. This is the first, most important objection against re-opening the discussion since it was closed in the second century.

Another objection must be considered. Is such mission not contestable? In a pluralistic world we should not make proselytes, but strive for peaceful coexistence of religions and worldviews. Are all religions not representations of the belief in one universal, ultimate being?

A discussing of mission among the Jews provides a better understanding of what mission is. If mission among the Jews is required from the perspective of Christian faith, the debate on mission among

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other people is also decided because Christianity developed in the context of Judaism. If the Jews must convert, other people are required to do so as well unless we exclude them from the community of Christians and Jews. But this contradicts the universal claim of Christianity: God is a God for all people. The question is: Should people convert to this universal God, or is He God for all people, independent of their convictions, rituals and confessions?

We can start the discussion by considering people in general. There are no neutral people. There is always a specific nation, a tradition, or a community. We could consider an arbitrary community for our discussion, but the truth about mission can only be realised if we start with the community for which mission is the most contestable: the Jews. Must Jews convert to Christianity?

2. JEWS ARE ALREADY WITH THE FATHER

Franz Rosenzweig stated that he intended to become a Christian, but changed his mind when he realised that this was not necessary. He knew the words of Jesus: "Nobody *comes* to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). These words seem to imply that everybody must become a Christian. But if we listen more closely, we must notice that Jesus states: "Nobody comes to the Father except through Me." Jews are already with the Father. Israel is his first-born son (Ex. 4:22). Therefore they do not have to come to the Father and do not need Jesus (Rosenzweig 1935:68, 73). Jesus is only the way to God *for Gentiles*.

We have got since our birth and by our birth, in our blood, what a Christian must experience once later in his life (Rosenzweig 1935:356).

The Jews are the people of God who belong to Him since the days of Abraham. They are in an everlasting covenant. Gentiles can enter this covenant if they are circumcised and observe the law (according to most Jews) or have faith in Jesus (according to Christians.)

According to Rosenzweig, the idea of mission among the Jews must be rejected. It is not only not necessary, but also an insult to the God of Israel. It is a denial of the everlasting faithfulness of God to his people. Conversion is similar to stating that the covenant was worthless until now and that we do not believe in God's faithfulness to his people.

Some Christian authors agree with Rosenzweig's opinion. Ellen Flesseman-Van Leer, a Dutch theologian who was very active in the ecumenical movement, was from a Jewish family. She was later baptised. Towards the end of her life, she mentioned that she would not have been baptised if she had to make the decision now. A Jew does not need to become a Christian. Other theologians are stricter. Brockway (1988:185f.) states that proselytism among Jews must be forbidden "on the theological ground that it is rejection of Israel's valid covenant with God." Today many Christians will agree with him, in particular those in the West. They often try to share some of the Jewish habits. This does not imply that Jews appreciate this attitude of non-Jews. Most Jews hold the conviction that people can be in the covenant of God only by circumcision and the law. They even reject the tendency among Christians to stress the Jewish identity of Jesus. They believe that Jesus is not the way to God, but that He is a heretic Jew.

I agree with the rejection of the present modern reclamation of Jesus as a Jew or even as great Jew: he was a Pausche Jissroel (an apostate of Israel; Rosenzweig 1935:499).

Christians must not claim Judaism. A rabbi responded to a young Christian man who said he felt Jewish: "*Where* do you feel yourself like a Jew?"

The consequence of the opinion held by Christian theologians that mission among the Jews is superfluous and even blasphemous is the idea of two paths to the kingdom of God (as long as theologians do not opt for a pluralism of religions). Christians come to the Father and his Kingdom by Jesus; Jews by birth, circumcision and observance of the law. This opinion is widely accepted in Germany and the churches can officially proclaim it. In 1980 the synod of the *Rheinische Landeskirche* of the *Evangelische Kirche* accepted a document expressing this conviction. Most churches do not take the full consequences of Rosenzweig's position, but many tend to accept it — although often with ambiguity.² The uneasiness with the topic is expressed by that ambiguity, although it has to do with the basic confessions of faith and belief in the only true God.

2 For the text of the document of the *Rheinische Landeskirche*, see Klappert & Stark (1980:264-281).

This attitude also evokes counter-reactions. In fundamental religious beliefs there cannot be ambiguity or even indifference. Keith (1997:279) writes: "Today some churches veer to a position where the attitude of Jews to Jesus has almost become an irrelevance." Nevertheless, is the opposition to general religious pluralism stronger than that to the concept of two different ways for Christians and Jews? That also has to do with the different context: religious pluralism is usually found among liberal theologians, while the idea of a separate way for the Jews is supported in some orthodox evangelical circles.

3. THE DEBATE ON ROSENZWEIG'S CONCLUSION

Rosenzweig's conclusion that those who are with the Father do not have to come to the Father seems self-evident at first. However, this is disputable. We can argue in favour of the need for conversion without neglecting God's faithfulness to the covenant. Rosenzweig's reasoning is in fact mechanical and does not take into account the real discourse, both of the words of Jesus and of the covenant in the Old Testament.

First, the argument from the words of Jesus is a kind of sophistic reasoning that is not intended in the text. Jesus does not speak about the relationship with the Father in the context of Gentiles, but in the context of Jews. He was a Jew. Although Rosenzweig's refutation of *Judenfreundlichkeit* may be correct, it may also be fatal for Jews to acknowledge Jesus' membership of the Jewish people. He is a radical Jew and for this reason the claim "We have Abraham as a father" was not enough for Him. You must do the *works* of Abraham (John 8:39f.). This is expressed in the attitude towards Jesus. In the context of the Gospel of John, Rosenzweig's reading is nonsense. The debates are not about the Gentiles, but about the Jews.

Another reasoning takes for granted that everybody who is a son of Abraham is in the covenant and in community with the Father. Being a Jew automatically guarantees salvation. This is not only against the Gospel of John, but also against the Old Testament. It is not enough to be a Jew by birth. You must also be circumcised. Those who are not circumcised will be cut off from the people of God (Gen. 17:14). Circumcision is not a simple ritual. It has to do with death. People

of God, and most of all the son of God, are in danger of death. Who can be with God and stay alive? Only circumcision as bloodshed can save. Without blood a circumcision is not valid.³ By birth Jews belonged to the people of God's covenant if they went through death: by circumcision, by the blood of the Lamb at Passover, by the sacrifices at Yom Kippur and by the offering of daily sacrifices in the sanctuary.

These rituals are not sufficient either. Jews must observe the law. The covenant does not exist in some ritual performances, but in observance and obedience. The book of Deuteronomy displays both blessing and curse (see especially Deut. 28). If Israel is obedient, they will receive all possible blessings. But if they are unfaithful to the law, they will be punished and finally severed from communion with God. There is a tendency to take the covenant unconditionally, although in the Old Testament the covenant is given conditionally. There is thus a tendency to only select the positive promises of God for his people and to neglect his threats. Arguing against the Jews, Augustine states that they say "That's us!" if it is about a promise to the people, but if it is about punishment they do not exclaim that (*Adv. Iud.* 9f.).

As far as the Jews of that time are concerned, Augustine argues that it would be more appropriate for them to take the latter verses. The Diaspora that followed the devastation of the temple is an expression of the fulfilment of the threats of the prophets rather than that of the fulfilment of the promises. Augustine is correct. The prophets consistently argued that God will not accept the injustice of his people. That Israel is saved time and again is nothing to boast about and is never self-evident. It is only due to God's own faithfulness. Nobody can claim to have God as a Father — not even a Jew, — because in the words of the prophet Malachi (1:6) "If I am a Father, where is the honour due to me?". He is the last of the prophets of Israel to deny the self-

3 Circumcision is a symbolic death. See Van Arkel (2001:192-198) and Van de Beek (2002:294-296). The story of the offering of Isaac can be compared to Ex. 4: 21-26 (Van de Beek 2002:98-101). Jews interpret the text differently: it is not about death but about binding to the law. Therefore, they speak about "the binding [*aqeda*] of Isaac".

evidence of God as a Father. Israel *itself* denies it by their behaviour. They do not honour Him, so they should not claim Him as a Father.⁴

These arguments in respect of the observance of the law can be used against boasting, but they cannot undo God's faithfulness. Even if Israel does not deserve God as a Father, God remains their Father. Human disobedience cannot annul divine love. God has compassion with his children and removes our sins. He does not treat us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities (Ps. 103:10-13). We should not call on forgiveness neither too easily nor too early. In this case we would proclaim cheap grace. But ultimately we have to confess God's faithfulness. Ultimately, the coming of God, provides forgiveness of our sins.

The promises of God exceed the observance of the covenant of the law. History, as a history of disobedience and ambiguity, will not last forever. God will finally come and bring his kingdom, as proclaimed by the Gospels. The kingdom does not come by observance of the law, but by the coming of the Son. God Himself will fulfil everything that is written by the prophets (Luke 18:31). John the Baptist proclaims his coming. He still proclaims the baptism of conversion as preparation: "After me will come the One who will not baptise with water, but with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). Jews must be included into the Pentecost event. They must die according to the law and receive the Spirit of Christ. He will make them a new creation. They will do the law as it is written in their hearts and in a new life. That is a new covenant.

The idea of a new covenant comes from the prophet Jeremiah.

The time is coming says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts (Jer. 31:23).

According to the Gospels, this new covenant was given in the blood of Christ. It is the celebration of Christian faith, the Eucharist: "This is the blood of the new covenant" (Luke 22:20). That phrase can only be understood when viewed from the perspective of God's covenant with

4 A similar attitude can be found among Christians who interpret "Abba" as a friendly daddy. That is not at all the meaning of the word in the context of the New Testament. See Barr (1988).

Israel. Due to Israel's disobedience, the covenant can only be fulfilled in the coming of God for the salvation of his people. They have to die according to the law, receive a new life, become a new creation, and enter a new covenant. This is not new to the New Testament and foreign to the canon of Israel. The fulfilment is new, but the concept is present in the Old Testament. Without God's own intervention, Israel cannot be saved for the kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jeremiah on the ruins of Jerusalem. This is his hope. For Israel will never fulfil the law. In a debate the Jewish scholar Tzvi Marx argued that Jeremiah had a bad day when he wrote this. We should be more optimistic than the prophet in his depression. Reading the Old Testament, I cannot share his optimism. And I prefer to join Jeremiah in a much greater optimism: in God's coming for the salvation of his people.

4. INCORPORATION INTO CHRIST

The Old Testament is full of the expectation of God's coming. The New Testament tells about its fulfilment. God has come in order to save the world. The new covenant is given in the blood of Christ. Sharing his death is sharing the fulfilment of God's kingdom. Becoming a Christian is the result of being baptised into Christ and sharing his death and the communion of his life. Christians are incorporated in Him. He is their life. They are not incorporated into Israel, but into Christ. This is the only salvation for both Jews and Gentiles: they share the communion with the God of Israel who has filled everything on the cross. No Gentile will be saved without this God; no Jew will enter the kingdom without this action of God. Salvation is in the reconciling body and blood of Christ.

Therefore Christians must not become Jews. If they want to be saved by Judaism, they must observe their laws (Gal. 5:3). But then you turn everything upside down; you want to be saved by the law that is not salutary. Christians must not be circumcised, but Jews must be baptised in Christ. On noticing that Galatians think they should be circumcised, Paul bursts out: "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified" (Gal. 3:1).

That does not imply that Jews and Gentiles are alike. Jews come from the law to Christ, while Gentiles do not have the law. There is a difference in conversion and, therefore, a difference in the missionary approach. Gentiles have to die from a life without the law; Jews from a life with the law. As Hendrikus Berkhof states: Jews and Gentiles have a different way to Christ — not a different way to the Father (Berkhof 1950:403f.).

Jews are closer to God than Gentiles:

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ. (Rom 9:4f.)

Every Christian theologian must take this into account. Jews are the chosen people. They enter the new covenant from the old covenant, while the Gentiles are excluded from the covenant by birth and circumcision (Eph. 2:11-22). However, both must die with Christ in his death in baptism. In this way both may receive remission of sins.

5. SHOULD WE USE THE WORD “MISSION” FOR JEWS

Hendrikus Berkhof is of the opinion that Jews can be saved by Christ alone. However, he argues that we should avoid the word “mission” as it does not take into account the different ways to Jesus for Gentiles and Jews (Berkhof 1969:339). Gentiles come from paganism to Christ; Jews from a long tradition of life with the true God. Gentiles must learn from the beginning; Jews must see their Messiah as the fulfillment of what they have already received. Due to this difference, we should not use the same word for the proclamation of the gospel for both Jews and Gentiles.

In addition, there are too many wrong associations from the past. *Jodenzending* is too closely associated with violence, social exclusion, and forced baptisms. The word itself will put off the Jews instead of attracting them to the freedom of the gospel, and Christians who use it are not critical enough of their past. Therefore, we should use another word.

The Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, to which Berkhof belonged, followed the path indicated by Berkhof (and others). Different words were used to express the missionary tasks of the church. The Church order of the denomination speaks about *mission* (*zending*) to the Gentiles and about the *proclamation* (*betuigen*) of the Word to nation and government. In the first version (1951) the following clause was added: “pursue the discussion with Israel to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ” (*Kerkorde Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, art. VIII, 2). First, the word “discussion” is introduced, bringing the relationship with Israel on a different level than that with the Gentiles. A discussion presupposes a common ground. In addition, “proclaim” is used. “Proclamation” is also the word for the relationship to society and government which at that time was still predominantly influenced by Christendom. “Proclaim” obviously presupposes a common ground, but not a full discipleship.

Both can be emphasised. Those who stress the common ground consider the concept of two ways. Those who stress the proclamation to those who are not true disciples interpret the formula in such a way that it is not different from mission, but just another word. Therefore many members of the DRC rejected this formula and the church order was amended in 1991. The new version is as follows: “pursue the discussion with Israel as for the understanding of the Holy Scripture.” Here Jews and Christians are on the same level in the understanding of the Scriptures.

The Christian understanding of Scripture is subjected to a debate on Christians and Jews. This debate can only be opened if the interpretation that Christ is the way to the Father could turn out to be wrong. However, I think we can debate on the interpretation of Scripture, but it seems to me that it is impossible to reinterpret this core of the Christian message.

6. WHAT IS MISSION?

If we want to find the right word for the relationship of Christians and Jews, we must consider what the debate is about. We cannot infer this from the present religious, cultural or societal sensitivities, but from the core of the faith in Jesus Christ. What does He mean for the Jews

not according to their own opinion, but *according to the Scriptures*? In order to answer this question, the Scriptures that are common for Jews and Christians should suffice. The authors of the New Testament are convinced that everything they tell about Jesus is in the Old Testament. Their task is to tell the story of Jesus. If this story really happened, then conclusions can be drawn from the Old Testament.⁵

The Gospel of Luke refers to a word of Jesus: “Everything that is written by the prophets will be fulfilled to the Son of Man” (Luke 18:31).⁶ The whole Jewish Bible is witness to Him. Other authors of the New Testament are often explicitly and implicitly of the same opinion. According to the last chapter of Luke, Jesus explained all that was written about Himself in the Scriptures. He explains to the “foolish and slow of heart” (Luke 24:25) that God had to come in order to save Israel by death and suffering — beginning with Moses and the prophets. New Testament authors often refer to specific verses in the Old Testament. The quotations refer to a general message of the Old Testament. There is indeed a common ground with Israel. We can find God’s relationship with Israel and thus the arguments of Christians in the debate with Jews in their own Holy Scripture.

If Israel is with the Father under the law, they will continuously suffer the Father’s condemnation because they are not obedient. A Jew must be converted to God. Paul, a Jew and a Pharisee, knew that from his own experience on the road to Damascus. The Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, had to be baptised (Acts 9:18). It was only by dying according to the law that he received the freedom to serve the Lord as a free person and not as a slave (Gal. 5:1). That is the way of Jews to God. Paul describes this experience in Romans 8:1f.:

- 5 See the difference of “meaning” and “reference” in Wright (2003):
Christian and non-Christian Jews from the Pharisees tradition in the first century agreed about the meaning of the resurrection of the dead. They even agreed about the theoretical reference of “resurrection of the dead”. They only disagreed about the reference in reality: was Jesus raised from the dead or not; did it really happen or not.
- 6 Many translations follow the *lectio minor*: “Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.” The status of this version is, however, so low that Metzger (1975) does not even discuss it.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

This message must be proclaimed. The first to hear it are the Jews under the law that brought them to death by their own disobedience. But let this be clear: it is not a discussion; it is a message. Apostles are apostles who are sent to tell what happened. It is the good message, the *euangelion*, both for Jews and Gentiles.

Therefore there is no question about mission among the Jews, as it belongs to the core of the Christian faith. By contrast, Brockway states that mission among the Jews should be forbidden. I say it is *commanded* to proclaim to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, because God raised Him from the dead. The Jews are the first people in the covenant to be informed about this good news. Subsequently, the mission to the Gentiles is the same message: Jesus Christ, who was crucified and raised from the dead. Mission has to do with a message, with *this* message, and not with a religious pattern of beliefs or a Christian culture and society.

7. THE PRIORITY OF THE JEWS

The message to the Gentiles and the message to the Jews do not have the same priority. Mission to the Jews always precedes mission to the Gentiles: "First the Jew and then the Gentile" (Rom. 2:10). Jesus commands this sequence in the Book of Acts (Acts 1:8). The way of the gospel begins in Jerusalem. The first people to be converted were the Jews in Jerusalem; subsequently, the Hellenistic Jewish community received its own place (Acts 6). Then the gospel went to Samaria (Acts 8:4-25) and to the pilgrim from Ethiopia as a new Queen of Sheba (Acts 8:26-39). This man is contrasted to the unconverted Paul, who does not know that the Queen of Sheba will rise at the judgement of the people with which Jesus is confronted (Matt. 12:42). The author of Acts places Paul between the pilgrim from Ethiopia and the story of Peter in Joppa (Acts 9:36-43). The Pharisee is like Jonah, who fled from Joppa in order to prevent the conversion of the people of Nineveh (Jonah 1:3; 4:2; cf. Matt. 12:41). Only after Paul's conversion — first the Jew — the gospel goes on: first to the proselytes (Acts 10) and then to the full Gentiles (from Acts 13).

“First the Jew” is also the consistent sequence in Paul’s missionary work. Paul always goes to the synagogue first and only after his message is rejected there, he turns to the Gentiles (Acts 13:14, 44; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1, 10, 17; 19:8). The first contact in Corinth as in Rome is also a Jew: Aquila (Acts 18:1-3, 28:17).

So mission among the Jews has high priority.

8. BY WHOM AND HOW?

We can discuss who the first people should be who must be appointed to do this missionary work among the Jews. It is more convenient that Jewish rather than Gentile Christians did so. This is not because Jews will be more easily convinced by Jews than by Gentiles. This can be disputed. The main argument is that the same priority should be maintained in the mission as well: first the Jew and then the Gentile.

Nevertheless, if Gentile Christians speak with Jews they have to witness that Jesus is the Christ. They have to do so (at the very least) in order to explain to the Jews that they, as Gentiles, are also children of the God of Israel.

Many books have been published on the method of mission with the focus on mission among the Gentiles. As far as mission among the Jews is concerned, it is generally about mission as such and not about the method. This indicates the low priority of that mission. It is not elaborated and neither is its method. For the gospel must be told to the Jews in a different way than to the Gentiles because of the common ground. A methodology for mission that is different from the ways used in previous centuries to urge or manipulate Jews should be developed.

Currently, we refer only to three cases from the book of Acts, in which we gather how the Apostles conceived their task to tell the Jews the good news. In all cases they refer to the Old Testament. Of course, they do so because, according to them, the Scriptures bear witness of Jesus and the Scriptures were accepted by the Jews.

The ways in which they tried to convince the Jews by means of the Scriptures were very different. Acts 2 recounts the first missionary sermon. It is a fierce confrontation with the Jews that ended with the accusation: “This Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). This con-

frontation is not outdated. Even twentieth-century Jews agree that they killed Jesus, and, according to Rosenzweig, they would do so again because He is an apostate. Rosenzweig is of the opinion that Christians hold a similar point of view. The confrontation cannot be stronger: Peter and all Christians following Him confess that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, and is God acting in the world in a definite way; the Jews conceive Him as an apostate who does not deserve to live.

In Acts 3 the confrontation is less serious. The emphasis is not on the climax of an accusation, but on the fulfilment of God's promise. God raised Jesus, "whom you and your leaders delivered in ignorance", from the dead (Acts 3:17). It was by this mistake that God gave his grace. So, it is not an accusation but mere ignorance.

Paul's sermon in Acts 13 is even more moderate. He tells the history of Jesus by referring to the belief in, and the longing for, the Messiah who is the son of David. Those in Jerusalem delivered Him (Acts 13:27). The Jews in Antioch were not involved in the crucifixion of Jesus. Paul suggests: "I hope you will listen better!", thus trying to bring the hearers to his side.

What are the results of these various methods? Of course, we cannot generalise. However, the effects are surprising. We would expect that Paul's moderate tone rather than Peter's accusation would be a winner. However, it is the opposite. After the first sermon, approximately three thousand people are converted and baptised (Acts 2:41). Peter's more moderate sermon results in imprisonment (Acts 4:3) and Paul is expelled from the city (Acts 13:50) and nearly killed by the Jews from Antioch (Acts 14:19).

This does not imply that confrontation is always fruitful. Stephen also brings his speech to the climax of an accusation (Acts 7:51-53). The history of Israel is a history of disobedience. It is a history of misunderstanding the living God. It cost Stephen his life. Is that because of the accusation? It is remarkable that Stephen does not refer to Jesus — only to the Jews' disobedience. It is one thing to display someone's sins, yet another to tell the story of Jesus. "I did not know Jesus Christ and Him crucified", Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2:2). The Corinthians were Gentiles, but the same message is also given to the

Jews. The Book of Acts reveals that when this is displayed more people are confronted with the truth and convert.

9. MISSION OF GENTILES TO THE JEWS

Gentile Christians can enter the mission to the Jews only after Jews confess Jesus. As mentioned, this requires a specific method. The basis for this is the Scripture — the Old Testament. The core of mission among the Jews is to tell them that Christ died and was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures, and to convince them to investigate the Scriptures in order to find out whether this is true (Acts 17:11). This is tough for Gentiles and for Christians from the Gentiles. It requires knowledge of the Old Testament that is compatible with the knowledge of the Jews. Who can discuss this? The first requirement for Gentile Christians is to learn what is written in the Scriptures — preferably by heart as the Jews do. Secondly, they must understand the Scriptures better than the Jews do: in the perspective of their fulfilment in Jesus. A thorough knowledge of the Old Testament and an interpretation in the paradigm of Christ is needed for mission among the Jews. For that reason only, it should be left to the Jewish Christians. Not as an easy way out, but as a shame for all those Christians who speak about Jesus as the only way, but do not take the effort to study their own Bibles and the Word of God that witnesses to Him. Who can understand the message about Christ in the New Testament without the Old Testament?

Knowledge of the Scriptures is not enough. We can know every text, but we must direct our life to the message of the Scripture. We can even be zealous for God, but with a zeal that is not based on true knowledge (Rom. 10:2). The knowledge of the Scriptures must be reflected in a life with Christ, the crucified Christ. It must be noted that Christ was known by the men in Emmaus by the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:31f., 35). The instruction from the Scriptures was wonderful. Their hearts burnt (Luke 24:32). But it was not enough. By breaking the bread, they recognised the Lord.

The Eucharist is the remembrance of Christ, of his death. We celebrate his grace and love. We share the communion with Christ and we share it together as his body and people who only live through his death. We give our lives to Christ.

How different was reality! Christians were not the people of 1 Corinthians 13. They were not a community of love and care. They were neither for each other nor for the Jews. Much needs to be done before we can begin to fulfil our calling towards the Jews. We must learn from the Jews that religion should not have an ulterior motive (see Van de Beek 2005) — not to gain something. It is pure enjoyment in the service of the Lord such as Jews celebrate *Simchat torah*, the enjoyment in the law of God. So Christians should have even more enjoyment in God's liberating love. If we do not learn this, we will not have a message for the Jews.

The coming of Christ requires a life of communion with Christ: reverence of God and his grace. Paul speaks in Romans 11:25 about the fullness of the heathens. Usually this fullness is understood quantitatively: the full number of Gentiles must become Christians and then the Jews will convert. A qualitative interpretation is more probable. "Pleroma" is not the full number, but the full quality. When Christians become full of the grace and the love of the Lord, the threshold to Israel will be taken away. Thus, conversion of the Jews begins with the conversion of Christians. Unless they are living letters of the Lord their message is a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

10. CONCLUSION

Mission among the Jews is essential because all people should hear the good news of Christ's grace and victory. Mission is not proselytism but telling what God has done, what happened. Both Jews and Gentiles must know this. Since Abraham the Jews are the first people to be informed. Because the message of God has to do with his acting in the Christ event, true religion is based on a message about a unique historic event and the acts of a person. That makes religious universalism impossible from a Christian perspective. We must witness the message about Christ even on the common ground with Israel. But that message will be frustrated when Christians do not convert. Mission among the Jews begins with mission among Christians: to express that they do not belong to this world, not even to themselves, but that they are owned by Jesus Christ, the crucified Saviour (Heidelberg Catechism 1).

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