

THE FOUR-DOOR LABYRINTH

Part 3 of 4

by Steve Hays

V. Door 3

Is the New Covenant continuous with the Old?

I. Yes! —

- (i) Covenant theology
- (ii) Roman Catholicism

II. No! —

- (i) Marcionism
- (ii) Fundamentalism
- (iii) Anabaptism
- (iv) Lutheranism
- (v) Judaism

A. Continuous Systems of Federalism

1. *Covenant Theology*

For Covenant theology, covenantal continuity isn't absolute, but presumptive. It assumes the Old Covenant to continuous with the New assuming that the New Covenant does not assert otherwise a point of discontinuity, by express or implicit teaching. So, for example, a covenant theologians would say that the moral law is still binding because you can see it carry over into the NT,¹ whereas the ceremonial law is subsumed and sublimated in the person and work of Christ because the NT says so (e.g., Heb 4-10). So the alternation between points of continuity and discontinuity is not drawn arbitrarily, but on a principled basis; for covenant theology takes its cue from progressive revelation, and not some abstract principle of formal consistency.²

For a covenant theologian, the church is comprised of the elect, be they Jews or Gentiles. For a fundamentalist, Israel antedates the Church, but for a covenant theologian, the church antedates Israel. For a covenant theologian, the distinction between promise and fulfillment applies, not so much to Israel and the

¹ E.g., note how the Holiness Code (Lev 19:11-18) quietly underwrites the moral theology of James (2:1,9; 4:11; 5:4,9,12,20).

² The creation mandates (Gen 1:28; 2:3) can be used as compass points to map the moral law in the Mosaic code.

Church, as it does to BC and AD, to the OT church and the NT church, to the Church before the advent of Christ and the Church after the advent of Christ.

For a covenant theologian, Israel was a part of the church, a medium of the Messiah, a custodian of the covenants, and a type of Christ. It would be good to think of the relation between promise and fulfillment along the lines of testament and inheritance. A covenant is like a last will and testament. Christ is the heir, and the church his inheritance.

Approaching this from another angle, God cut a covenant with Abraham and his seed. Who is the seed of promise? Who is party to this covenant? Is it the Jew? Is it ethnic Israel?

But the seminal theme doesn't begin with the Abrahamic covenant. It goes back to the *Protoevangelium* (Gen 3:15), of which the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are historical and instrumental exempla. The seed of promise is the seed of the woman, and the seed of the woman consists of the elect in union with Christ (e.g., Gal 3:16,29). So the dividing line is not between Jew and Gentile, Israel and the Church, but between elect and reprobate, the woman's seed and the serpent's seed.³

2. Catholicism

Roman Catholicism, with its sacerdotal system, presents a superficial point of continuity with the OT. Is the Catholic theologian more consistent than the covenant theologian?

Now, at one level, how we come out of Door #1 may already foreclose the Catholic option. For if *sola Scriptura* is the only rule of faith, then that thereby invalidates various dogmas distinctive to the Magisterium.

At more than one level, how we judge Catholicism depends, not only on how we come out of this door, but all four doors. If you affirm *sola Scriptura* and/or deny freewill and or deny sacramental grace, then Catholicism is bolted shut before you ever get to Door #3.

As this applies to Catholicism, covenant theology would say that even if the Roman priesthood were properly parallel to the Levitical priesthood, the discontinuance of the ceremonial law voids all comparison. The Levitical priesthood was at once foreshadowed and fulfilled in the priesthood of Christ. In addition, covenant theology would further deny that the sacrifice of the Mass is in

³ Debates over the regulative principle of worship also turn on questions of comparative continuity. Are the aesthetic elements of the Temple service part of the ceremonial law? What about holidays? The primary proof-text for the RPW is the Second Commandment (Exod 20:4), but this is proscriptive rather than prescriptive, and does not, as such, offer any positive guidance on the form and content of true worship. In the OT, the concrete details were supplied by the case law, and not the Decalogue.

any sense continuous with the ceremonial law.⁴ So both in principle and practice, the comparison is equivocal and fallacious.

II. Discontinuous Systems of Federalism

1. Marcionism

On the discontinuous end of the spectrum, the Marcionite heresy is self-refuting inasmuch as Marcion had to retrofit the canon of Scripture to accommodate his doctrine rather than draw his doctrine from the canon of Scripture. As such, it not only lacks the support of Scripture, but also openly opposes Scripture.

But this brings us to another question: “What is the cost of being wrong?” And the penalty varies with where you range along the spectrum. If the amillennial position is right, and the postmillennial is wrong, or vice versa, that is not all-important, for it comes down to a choice of center-left or center-right. But the price is much higher at the extremes of continuity (e.g. Catholicism) and discontinuity (Marcionism), for there the difference is not off by a few degrees either way, but radically opposed. At the far end you have no buffer zone, no middle ground, no margin of error. If you fall off the edge, you have nowhere to go but down, straight down.

In saying this, my motive is not to foster a latitudinarian disposition where “anything goes” in religious thought. I do believe there are damnable errors and nonnegotiable doctrines, and I also believe that the truth sometimes lines at the margins, and not somewhere in the middle. But for seekers and believers who find the sheer variety of choices to be very daunting, and whose anxiety tempts them to take spiritual short-cuts, to prematurely foreclose investigation, and instead to cultivate a false sense of security by contracting out their spiritual fortunes to a middle man with a winning sales-pitch; for people like these—and they are many—it is helpful and needful to slow both the heart-rate and pace of progress so that they don’t mistake a sinking ship for a lifeboat.

2. Fundamentalism

The dispensational aspect of Fundamentalism involves a distinctive ecclesiology and eschatology as it bears on the relation of Israel to the Church in space and time. The analysis is tricky, in part because it presents something of a moving target these days. But a basic issue is the role of Israel in the redemption of the world. To put it one way, is the adoption of Israel merely a means to an end, or an end in itself? Do the covenants with Abraham, Moses and David apply in some distinctive way to the identity and destiny of Israel, or is Israel a type and courier of the Church? Do the covenants in some way terminate on Israel, or is Israel a conduit of the covenants? Do the covenants signify Israel, or is Israel a sign of the Church and the messianic hope?

⁴ Cf. F. Turretin, *Institutes* (P&R, 1997), 3:519-48

It is important to keep in mind that dispensational and covenant theologians don't necessarily mean the same thing by "Israel" and the "Church." For a fundamentalist, Israel and the Church coincide with ethnic Jews and believing Gentiles respectively, whereas, for a covenant theologian, Israel and the Church intersect like the shaded area of overlapping circles.

When a fundamentalist looks at covenant theology, it appears to him that the covenants are fulfilled when the Church supercedes Israel. But that is because a fundamentalist sees Israel as prior to the Church, so that if the covenants apply to the church, then they can only apply by sidelining Israel.

But that is judging covenant theology in reference to a premise supplied by dispensationalism. For a covenant theologian, the covenants are fulfilled in the collective and singular seed of promise. They receive a singular and primary fulfillment in Christ, as well as a secondary and collective fulfillment in the Church inasmuch as the Church is in union with her head.

And all this has a further bearing on the millennial debate—with which fundamentalism is so associated. Many Christians suppose that the millennial debate begins with Rev 20. But it really begins with the OT expectation of the messianic age.

In order to appreciate that facet we must appreciate the nature of visionary revelation, for the apocalyptic and prophetic passages belong to the visionary genre of revelation. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zechariah were seers.

Now, many readers treat the apocalyptic and prophetic passages as if these were an exercise in inspired crystal ball gazing. The prophet peers into the crystal ball and sees future events as they unfold in real space and time.⁵

But this commits a category mistake. What a seer sees is not a chronicle of the future, but a symbolic vision of the future. His prophecy is not a record of the future, but a record of what he saw in his mind's eye. It is important that we not confound a visionary sequence with a historical sequence. Even though a vision may often be about things to come, we should not necessarily equate events that are imminent in the vision with events that are imminent in real time. That confuses the visionary process with the historical process.

And it is in this general connection that we should note how certain verses concerned with the "imminent" return of Christ (e.g., Mt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34; Rev 1:1,7) have their background in the visions of Daniel (cf. 2:28-30,44-45; 7:13-14).

⁵ Editor's Note: For instance, when one reads (Rev. 9:7) of John seeing grasshoppers with golden hair flying about—did he see nuclear powered helicopters or did he see locusts with yellow crowns? Did he see an image of a contemporary situation, then a message that it would occur in the future, or a future scene?

In addition, at least three of the Apostles were seers—Peter (Acts 10:9-16), Paul (2 Cor 12:1-4) and John (Rev 1:1,10f.; 4:1ff). Not only does this involve a visionary process, but a *revisionary* process inasmuch as a seer such as John processes revelation as an imaginary montage of earlier visions. He sees events through the eyes of Ezekiel and Daniel, Isaiah and Zechariah, like photographic lenses that color and filter his own visionary experience.

Now, there are cases in which the Bible does offer a direct description of the future. For example, Acts 1:11 predicts the return of Christ in observational language. But we must be on guard against assuming that apocalyptic predictions (e.g., Mt 16:28) have direct reference to a public experience or event. For this could have immediate reference to a visionary experience. Such a vision will also have an extra-visionary point of reference. But we can't peg a one-to-one correspondence.

This is both because a vision is not reality in the raw, and because symbolism is inherently open-textured inasmuch as the fit between sign and significate is conventional. For example, clouds can stand for storm clouds, and thereby illustrate divine judgment (e.g., the Flood/Parousia); but clouds can also stand for the Shekinah, and thereby illustrate God's gracious presence (e.g., the tabernacle/Transfiguration).

So there's a sense which every date-setting school, be it preterist, historicist or futurist shares a common confusion. The most we can say, although this is saying quite a lot, is that we can use our own historical position as a relative, but not an absolute, point of reference. Many of the end time events in Scripture are still future to us for the simple reason that they don't lie in the past; if they lay in the past, then we would lie in the past inasmuch as they forecast the terminus of church history. Yet church history has yet to end.

3. *Anabaptism*

I have lined up the alternatives according to their degree of discontinuity or continuity. That, however, represents a provisional and conventional classification, and we may find that the real and deeper contrast lies elsewhere. On the face of it, Anabaptism accentuates covenantal discontinuity. It takes its pacifism from the Sermon on the Mount, and its separatism from 2 Cor 6 & Rev 18. At this level, Anabaptist theology would seem to present the antipode of covenant theology.

But appearances are somewhat deceptive. For Anabaptist theology is deeply indebted to Exodus-typology, and this is something it shares in common with covenant theology. Both the Pilgrim and Anabaptist viewed themselves as strangers in a strange land, a walled garden within the wide wilderness of sin. The Church is not merely the *Civitas Dei*, but the *Civitas Peregrine* [City of Pilgrims], set over against the *Civitas Diaboli*.

So OT narrative casts a long shadow over the Anabaptist vision of the walk of faith. Both the Pilgrim and Anabaptist identify with the OT saint, and situate themselves in the typical landscape of redemption. As Bradford and Cotton Mather each put it:

So they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting place near twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits.⁶

I write of the wonders of the Christian religion, flying from the deprivations of Europe to the American strand; and, assisted by the holy Author of that religion, I do with all conscience of truth, required therein by him who is the truth itself, report the wonderful displays of his infinite power, wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness, wherewith his divine providence hath irradiated an Indian wilderness.⁷

The difference is that, for the Anabaptist, every generation recapitulates the Exodus-generation, redeemed from bondage, but ever wandering in the wilderness; whereas the Pilgrim views himself as Caleb or Joshua, taking possession of the Promised Land.

The Anabaptist is a perpetual pilgrim, and his nomadic existence keeps him unspotted from the carnal entanglements of the world. I made mention of 2 Cor 6 and Rev 18, but these do not represent a dispensational disjunction, for each is grounded in Isa 52:11 (cf. 2 Cor 6:17; Rev 18:9). So both OT and NT saint must flee from Babylon.

So far I've been discussing the traditional difference between covenant theology and Anabaptist theology. But we now need to draw a further distinction between old school Anabaptism and new school Anabaptism, for modern authors like Sider, Yoder, Wallis, Hauerwas and McClendon have taken their tradition from a stance of radical social isolationism to radical social activism. So they too, believe that the land of milk and honey lies within reach.

But the modern-day denial of separatism also calls into question the remaining commitment to pacifism inasmuch as pacifism was embedded in separatism. The argument for pacifism was that the Christian didn't have a vested interest in the world; as such, he didn't fight for the state because the state represents an extension of the world. But if a modern Anabaptist now proclaims his stake in the world, then he has had gone over to the Constantinian side.

⁶ W. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (Knopf, 1994), 47.

⁷ C. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Banner of Truth, 1979), 1:25.

The remaining difference is then that the Pilgrim conquers Canaan with the Gospel of grace, whereas the new school Anabaptist conquers Canaan with the social gospel.

Besides the separatist accent, wherever that still stands, is the pacifist accent. And here the Anabaptist takes his cue from the Sermon on the Mount—the assumption being that the Sermon on the Mount represents a radical shift from OT to NT ethics.

But this is a problematic move. To begin with, the Anabaptist is very fond of the Sixth Commandment. But even if this justified his pacifist stance, it would do so on the warrant of OT ethics.

It should also be obvious that the Sixth Commandment does not underwrite nonviolence. In the cases law there were no fewer than 16 capital offenses. The law also acknowledges justifiable homicide in the case of the nighttime intruder (Exod 22:2). And, of course, there are the provisions for holy war (Deut 20).

But going back to the Sermon on the Mount, it is unclear just why, on the face of it, we should treat this sermon as the inaugural address of the New Covenant. For the subject matter doesn't invite that expectation. We would expect a transition from the Old to the New Covenant to discontinue the ceremonial law rather than the moral law. Of course, God is always free to confound our expectations, but where the Gospel of Matthew expressly signals a covenantal shift, the subject-matter confirms our prior expectations—for Christ is there fulfilling the ceremonial law (26:28) and inaugurating the New Covenant foreseen and forecast by Jeremiah.

In addition, Mt 5:17-19 reads like a formula of covenant renewal, sealed with the inscriptional curse (cf. Deut 4:2; 12:32). So this would lay heavy emphasis on covenantal continuity.

It is easy for the modern reader to forget that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to Jews, not Christians—to Jews still living under the Old Covenant. So we need to distinguish between the historic viewpoint of Jesus and the narrative viewpoint of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew is addressed to Christians (or Messianic Jews), but not the Sermon on the Mount.

Are there any reasons for treating the Sermon on the Mount as both an exposition of the New Covenant and abrogation of the Old? Two reasons are commonly adduced. First, we have the antitheses of 5:21-48. And the oft-made assumption is that this voids the Old Covenant.

But that inference, while possible, overdraws the evidence. Laws can be repealed without repealing the covenant. For example, Deut 12:5,14 repeals Exod 20:24-26, yet Deuteronomy is a document of covenant renewal. In

transitioning from a nomadic existence in the wilderness to a settled existence in Canaan, there was a corresponding adjustment in particular provisions of the law. Likewise, the situation of Jews living under pagan occupation (the Roman Empire) was quite different from the situation of pagans living under Jewish occupation (the conquest of Canaan), so certain adaptations are called for, viz., the Roman custom of impressment (Mt 5:41).

Second, it is often said that Mt 5-7 presents Jesus as a second Moses. Moses delivered the Law from Mt. Sinai, and Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount. Now there is no doubt that Mosaic-typology is in play here.

However, the ministry of Moses is associated with more than one mountain, and is, in particular, book-ended by two mountains. So which figure is in view—the revelation of the covenant at the foothills of Horeb, or the renewal of the covenant at the foothills of Nebo? Given the parallel between the beatitudes of Jesus (Mt 5:2-12) and beatitudes of Moses (Deut 33:1-19), the Deuteronomic setting makes for a closer fit.

Or take Mt 5:9, which is a summa of the Anabaptist position. There are two problems with this appeal:

(i) There is a difference between a *peacemaker* and a *peacetalker* or *pacifist*. Nonresistance, flower power, pretty speeches, love beads and peace signs do not *effect* peace on earth. They don't prevent war and they don't end war. In fact, ^{the latter} was "usually applied to emperors," not to men who merely "live in peace, practicing nonresistance, but those who actually bring about peace..."⁸

(ii) Jesus' injunction is grounded, not in a distinctive NT ethic, but OT ethics (cf. Ps 34:14; Isa 52:7; Prov 10:10, LXX).

(iii) The Anabaptist fails to harmonize 5:9 with 10:34. Perhaps they would spiritualize 10:34. But why spiritualize 10:34 while taking 5:9 literally? Moreover, the opposition in view in 10:34 certain envisions actual violence in the persecution and martyrdom of Christian believers.

Another problem with playing off one Testament against the other is that the divine warrior-motif is common to both, and Christ is heir to both. Assuming Josh 5:13-15 to be a Christophany, the Captain of the Host is a warlord, and not merely in metaphor. And this has its counterpart in the knight on the white horse who leads the saints into battle (Rev 19:11-16). It is also striking that the author of Hebrews, although distinguished by his heavenly-mindedness, commends the martial exploits of the Judges (11:32).

In addition, the way we come out of Door #3 depends on how we came out of Door #2. There is a natural relation between Anabaptist ethics and Anabaptist

⁸ D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans, 1996), 113.

soteriology. If you deny an Augustinian view of sin and grace, then that entails a more hopeful view of human nature. Pacifism is prized on optimism. But if you believe that every impulse of the graceless heart is bent on evil all the time (Gen 6:5), then that fails to lay a very firm foundation for a policy of passive resistance. Indeed, Anabaptism is almost Manichean in its radical dualism between the church and the world. But if the world is irredeemably evil, then how is a policy of peaceful coexistence even possible?

Now the Anabaptist might reply that he preaches nonviolence, not because it is a winning strategy, but because it is the price of discipleship. And we must admit that martyrdom is often the cost of following Christ.

But there are situations in which the very survival of the Church is at stake. An entire book of the Bible is devoted to such a threat, and the covenant community was only able to save itself by launching a massive preemptive strike (Est 9:16). And it should be unnecessary to note that the enemies of the NT church are just as ruthless as the enemies of the OT church. Sin is the same under every dispensation. For example, John Wenger complains about how difficult it is to retain Anabaptist identity under regimes that fail to respect conscientious objection.⁹ Well, what did he expect! In a fallen world, if you never fight back you get slaughtered!

And unless an Anabaptist subscribes to the OT view of covenant children, then doesn't this dualism run right through the community of faith? Unless the seed of believers are believers, the Church becomes a Trojan horse for the world. One also wonders how the identity of the world as the *Civitas Diaboli* is consistent with the Anabaptist belief in unlimited atonement.

Anabaptism theology places great stock in the passive example of Christ (e.g., 1 Pet 2:20-24). And there is no doubt that many Christians are called upon to follow their Lord into martyrdom. But this appeal is lopsided:

(i) Anabaptist theology reduces the Atonement to the exemplary aspect. But that is very one-sided. Even Peter, to which the Anabaptist repairs, has a doctrine of penal substitution (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18).

(ii) Even on exemplary grounds, Christ is heir to the role of the divine warrior (Rev 19:11-15; cf. Josh 5:13-16). Why doesn't the *imitatio Christi* extend to the office of Christ as a warrior and judge?

Anabaptist writers accuse the Magisterial Reformers of simply yielding to the force of circumstance and trumping up an *ex post facto* justification for succumbing to the pressure of practical necessities.¹⁰ There may be some truth

⁹ The Doctrines of the Mennonites (Scottsdale, 1952), 35-37.

¹⁰ The Mennonite Encyclopedia, H. Bender et al., eds., (Scottsdale, 1955-59), 4:614a.

to this charge. On the face of it, it seems as if they take their initial cue from the world, and then look to Scripture for warrant.

But whatever the motive, this charge is somewhat question-begging, for Scripture is situated in a real world setting, in the world of Egypt and Assyria, Babylon and Rome. So the world you see out the window looks very much like the world you see in Scripture, save for an invisible dimension directing outward events. Modern threats to the people of God from Islam, the papacy, Marxism, Baathism, National Socialism and so on, are not a world apart from the threats facing OT Israel or the NT church, but true to type.

A final failing of Anabaptist ethics is its one-sidedness. It prioritizes and absolutizes the irenic ideal if that were the only value or supreme value in dominical and NT ethics. But what happens, as often happens, when the irenic ideal comes into conflict with the moral imperative of social justice (e.g., Mt 23:23; Lk 1:52-53; Rom 13:3-4; Jas 1:27-2:7; Rev 18)? What if gross injustice cannot be remedied by peaceful means? Doesn't Anabaptism come perilously close to the unctuous preacher who says to starving, shivering masses, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled" (Jas 2:16)? Consider what comfort Stanley Hauerwas has to offer the oppressed:

For Christians, the proper home for the language of evil is the liturgy: it is God who deals with evil, and it's presumptuous for humans to assume that our task is to do what only God can do...Does that mean there is nothing we can do? No, I think that a lot can be done...Christians might consider, for example, asking the many Christians in Iraq what we can do to make their lives more bearable. A small step, to be sure, but peace is made from small steps.¹¹

Aside from the fact that citizens of a police state are not free to speak their minds, there are other ways of overhearing their cries, if—that is—you have ears to hear. But within the soundproof sanctuary of his pacifist liturgy, Hauerwas is serenely tone-deaf to the screaming victims of the gas chambers and torture chambers, rape rooms and killing-fields—for all unpleasantness lies in a neutral zone, beyond good and evil. A small step, to be sure, but genocide is made from small steps. For sublime sophisticates like Hauerwas, moral outrage is a redneck vulgarity that civilized men must learn to rise above. At most, any breath of indignation is refinedly reserved for those that speak of evil out of turn.

4. Lutheranism

The law/gospel antithesis is fundamental to Lutheran hermeneutics. And Lutheran theology accuses Reformed theology of legalism because it characterizes that the offer of the Gospel is a conditional offer.¹²

¹¹ "No," This War Would Not Be Moral," Time (March 3, 2003), 45).

¹² F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (Concordia, 1970), 3:247-48.

I confess to finding this charge rather baffling, for it seems to me to ignore the obvious. On the one hand, the Gospel offer is conditioned on repentance and faith. On the other hand, Scripture also distinguishes between genuine and nominal conversion. I do not see, therefore, how the Reformed alternative can be gainsaid.

The Lutheran charge is careless in other key respects as well. There is a difference between conditions and meritorious conditions. Reformed theology denies that the subject, either before or after conversion, can do anything to merit his justification before God. Furthermore, Reformed theology would insist that if a given subject does exercise saving faith, that is entirely owing to the irresistible grace of God. God is ultimately responsible for both the stipulation and satisfaction of the conditions.

In addition, the law/gospel antithesis, such as it is, fails to either relate or distinguish the Testaments, for both bilateral and unilateral elements are discernible in the Old and New Covenants alike.¹³ My best guess is that Lutheran theology was already locked into this position before much scholarly study had been conducted on the character of covenants in Scripture and cognate literature.

5. Judaism

The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is, of course, key to their mutual identity and integrity. For a Messianic Jew, the Old Covenant is essentially continuous with the New insofar as it is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus. Excepting Luke, who may well have been a God-fearer, all of the NT authors are Messianic Jews.

For a rabbinical Jew, the OT is essentially discontinuous with the New Covenant inasmuch as he regards Jesus as a messianic pretender and the Christian faith to be a Jewish heresy.

Historically, Judeo-Christian dialogue has suffered from stereotyping on both sides. On the Christian side, it is common to hear it said that the Jews rejected Jesus because he didn't fit their preconception of a political Messiah. This is a half-truth. But it fails to distinguish between the religious establishment and the rank-and-file. The "laity" did have their sights set on a political Messiah who would oust the Romans and restore Jewish sovereignty (e.g., Jn 6:15; Acts 1:6). And when their expectations were disappointed, they turned against Jesus.

¹³ Cf. B. Waltke, "The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants," A. Geliadi, ed., *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration* (Baker, 1988), 123-39.

However, the concern of the religious establishment was just the opposite. They felt threatened by Jesus because they did view him as a political Messiah, and they were rather attached to the status quo because it kept them in power.

A lot of Christians also equate modern Jews with OT Jews. But many modern Jews do not identify with the OT. And even observant Jews tend to filter the OT through the Talmud.

Moreover, God cut a covenant with Abraham and his seed. But God never made a covenant with the Ashkenazi, for the Ashkenazi are of European descent. They are not ethnic Jews, and many are not even religious Jews.¹⁴

Furthermore, this comparison is deeply misleading; it fosters the image that Judaism is a continuum whereas Christianity is an offshoot. But it is crucial to realize that both rabbinic Judaism and Messianic Judaism (=Christianity) lay claim to be the legitimate heirs of OT faith and expectation. The relation of Christianity to Judaism is not of branch to trunk, but of branch to branch in relation to a common trunk. And the question is which is truly continuous with the OT.

For their part, many Jews entertain influential stereotypes of Christianity. One source of misunderstanding is the difference between rabbinical righteousness and Evangelical holiness. In rabbinical ethics, it is possible for a man to be a righteous man by keeping the law.¹⁵ In this definition, a righteous man is a good man, a man of high virtue. And this, in turn, creates an expectation of what it means or ought to mean for a Christian to be a good or bad Christian. Unless a Christian attains a certain standard of personal virtue, he is a hypocrite. And if enough Christians fall short, then the Christian faith must be deeply hypocritical.

But from the standpoint of Christian ethics, a Christian is not a good man, but a holy man. Holiness is both better and worse than mere goodness. A saint is not a man of outstanding morals. He is, first and foremost, a man who has been called and consecrated, set apart and sanctified by God's grace and God's righteousness. It isn't inborn or acquired. No one is born a Christian the way one is born a Jew or Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist. No one converts to Christianity the way one converts to Islam or Judaism. It isn't a personal attainment. It isn't the cause or consequence of a high moral character. Rather, it comes, if it comes at all, from without rather than within. It is a true vocation or calling.

¹⁴ Under the Mosaic covenant, Gentiles could convert to the faith of Israel, but they had to be covenant-keeping converts. And if, moreover, the Mosaic covenant was nullified by the work of Christ, then conversion to Judaism after the New Covenant are null and void.

¹⁵ Rabbinical righteousness has its counterpart in Catholic piety, with its penance and purgatory, congruent merit, Mariolatry and cult of the saints—in contradistinction to Evangelical holiness (i.e., the Lutheran/Reformed tradition).

This is by no means to deny that a Christian is set apart, in part, to be a man of godly character. But godliness and holy living are like the anchor beyond the veil (Heb 6:19). We are drawn *to* God because we are drawn *by* God. It is a deeper and stronger thing than mere goodness because we are drawn Godward by the bands of an everlasting and almighty love (Isa 54:7-8; Jer 31:3; Hos 11:4). A Christian has a heart for God because God has given him a heart to love and serve him. But he still suffers from heart disease, from a divided heart. It falls so short because it aims so high—higher than the heavens. And only in heaven will the distance be bridged.

Another major impediment is the notion of a *Divine* Messiah. This they regard as a blasphemous violation of OT monotheism (e.g. Exod 20:3; Deut 6:4; Isa 44:6).¹⁶ And they attribute the Deity of Christ to the tincture of Hellenistic philosophy.

That, however, doesn't fully explain their demurral. To begin with, this is an artificial reading of the NT. John's Logos-theology has its background in OT logos-theology, mediated by the Septuagint. And if you read the debates between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, not only in John, but also the Synoptics, on the nature of his divine Sonship, this is a controversy over the nature of the OT Messianic expectation and the terms of its fulfillment.

But even on its own grounds, the charge is not self-explanatory. Philo was far more Hellenistic than anything you find in the NT, yet Jews don't regard Philo as an infidel. Cabalism is a form of Neoplatonic theosophy, dressed up in Hebrew word-play, yet Cabalism isn't dismissed as an apostate philosophy. It is, in fact, striking how many of Paul's opponent's were not Palestinian Jews, but Hellenistic Jews (Acts 13:45,50; 14:2,19; 17:5,13; 18:12; 20:3). Paul himself was trained in Palestinian Judaism of the purest water.

Even on the question of Jesus' Messianic claims, the Jews didn't excommunicate the disciples of Bar Kochba just because they backed the wrong horse.¹⁷ The Talmud accuses Jesus of witchcraft,¹⁸ yet the practice of exorcism holds an honored place in Jewish tradition.¹⁹

Another charge is that Jesus tempted Jews to defy the Mosaic law. But even if that were true, it doesn't entirely account for the reaction. To begin with, many Jews disregard the kosher laws and other suchlike. In addition, the notion of a New Covenant is famously on display in OT Messianic expectation (Jer 31:31-

¹⁶ Strictly speaking, these prooftexts are neutral on the Trinity, for their purpose is not to define the divine nature in and of itself. For that, you have to turn to a passage such as Exod 34:6-7, with its enumeration of divine attributes. Rather, they are concerned to delimit the relation between the true God and idolatry.

¹⁷ For example, Bar Kochba was anointed by Rabbi Akiba, the leading rabbi of the age, yet Jews don't dismiss Rabbi Akiba as a renegade Jew.

¹⁸ Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 43a. In this text, incidentally, the Jews admit their complicity in the death of Jesus.

¹⁹ Cf. Josephus, Ant. 8:42-49.

34), so there is no *a priori* reason why Jews would necessarily take offense at a Messianic claimant just because he presented himself as inaugurating this promise. The true Messiah would have to assume that role. For that matter, Jews don't question the Jewish credentials of the Essenes, even though this sect severed its ties with the religious establishment and formal cultus. Josephus was a collaborator, yet he is freely cited as an authentic spokesman for first century Judaism.

So the reaction must cut deeper than the standard objections. I would suggest that it has two elements: anti-Semitism and the Jewish identity crisis. Regarding the first, many Jews blame the Church for the brunt of anti-Semitism, starting with the NT, and running through the Inquisitions, Crusades, pogroms and Holocaust.

Now, this is a complicated allegation. To begin with, the NT was written by Jews, so the charge of anti-Semitism seems oxymoronic. This is an intramural debate between fellow Jews.

Now, some Jews would counter that the NT reflects the phenomenon of the self-hating Jew. One problem with this charge is that it is usually applied to Jews who are torn between their heritage and the forces of assimilation. But the NT writers are not mainstreaming with Greco-Roman culture for purposes of social advancement. Indeed, they retain the OT denunciations of idolatry. Another problem is that the supposedly anti-Semitic verses in the NT are tame compared with the denunciations of stiff-necked Israel in the OT. So if the NT is anti-Semitic, so is the OT.

A further problem with this accusation is that it commits a cultural anachronism. Freedom of dissent is a modern notion. The reason that the Roman Catholic Church is an authoritarian institution is that it came of age during the era of autocratic government, and Roman Catholic polity is a mirror-image of Roman polity. Instead of the Roman Emperor and aristocracy, you have the Roman Pontiff and episcopate. The Roman Church made a fatal move when it turned a culture-bound polity into a divine and irreformable institution. But the immediate point is that the Roman Church was an equal-opportunity avenger. For she persecuted all forms of dissent, whether heretics, humanists, schismatics, infidels, Muslims, Jews, Protestants, lapsed Catholics, &c.

As I say, the modern idea of civil tolerance for religious dissent is just that, a modern idea. You don't find it in Luther, for that matter, you don't find it in Machiavelli or Suleyman.²⁰ I'm not a Lutheran, and I don't condone Luther's invective, but Luther was just as nasty things about the papists, Anabaptists, &c. Indeed, he said very nasty things about himself! This was a polemical age in which many writers on every side descended to vitriolic attack and counterattack.

²⁰ I would just add that, within my own theological tradition, the Calvinists have been distinguished by their general geniality towards the Jews.

And remember that religious offenses were capital offenses under the Mosaic Covenant as well. The Jews stoned Sabbath-breakers and blasphemers, and waged holy war against the heathen. And it was, indeed, the Jews who originally persecuted Christ and the Christians. And Messianic Jews are persecuted in modern Israel.

It should also go without saying that anti-Semitism antedates the rift between the church and the synagogue. The anti-Semitism of Pharaoh (Exod 6) and Haman (Esther) were hardly inflamed by the charge of Deicide. I would add that much of the persecution of the Jews owes as much or more to nationalism and national character than religion. For example, German Nazis were far harsher than Italian Fascists, and the Fascist measures largely owed to Nazi pressure.²¹

My immediate aim is not to sort out the right from the wrong in all of this, but just to remind the reader that he is guilty of selective morality if he singles out the Church for special blame in the history of religious persecution. This is not distinctive to the Church.

The other reason that so many Jews are so hostile to the Gospel is that it poses a threat to their already insecurity sense of identity. Many Jews define their Judaism in anti-Christian terms. I realize this is a provocative proposal, but what are we to think when a secular Jew is still a Jew, but a Messianic Jew is a traitor to his people?

The Jewish identity crisis is as old as Judaism itself. For Judaism was born in exile. The legend of the wandering Jew has its exemplar in Abraham, whom God called out of Ur. Heavenly-minded Messianic Jews like Abraham, Simeon and Stephen (cf. Acts 7; Heb 11) have never suffered from an identity crisis. But it has been a pervasive problem for many of the Jewish people throughout their long history. When they had the land, they identified with the land. But when they lost the land through exile or deportation, they no longer had this point of reference. Even when they had the land, there was a temptation to assimilate with the cultural climate of the surrounding nations, and thus lose their distinct identity as a covenant community. When they had the Temple, they identified with the Temple, But when they lost the Temple, twice over, they no longer had this point of reference.

When the Romans occupied the land, the challenge was again to maintain their identity as a holy people, set apart by God, despite the constant and defiling contact with their heathen overlords. The Essenes, Pharisees and Zealots each

²¹ "The Fascist alliance with Nazism delays the 'final solution' for Italian Jews until September of 1943, when the Germans took total command of northern Italy. Exceptional efforts of other Italians to protect their Jewish compatriots in occupied zones allow many of the latter to stay alive...In Eastern Europe, of course, the situation was much worse," M. Schneider, *Vengeance of the Victim: History and Symbolism in Giorgio Bassani's Fiction* (U of Minnesota, 1986), 57.

represent different distancing strategies to retain identity under Roman rule. The Pharisees resorted to a multiplication of purificatory rites to insulate themselves from daily defilement with Greek slaves and Roman masters. The Essenes took this strategy a step further, and more literally. Instead of a ritual buffer zone, they put physical space between themselves and the heathen by living apart from the contaminating presence of the pagan. And the Zealots took this strategy a final step, and, in a sense, inverted the Essene policy by trying to externalize the heathen. When the Zealot party won the argument, but lost the war, Palestinian Jews joined the Diaspora, and exported the Pharisaic strategy.

During the Middle ages, the ghetto imposed Jewish identity by a physical barrier. But when the fence fell, the temptation to assimilate with the dominant culture reasserted itself. And, indeed, some Jews were better Germans than the Germans. But their very success was held against them. For the Holocaust deassimilated the Jews. The bitter irony of Nazism was to confer a Jewish identity on many Jews who had lost their own sense of Jewishness, or done their best to put it behind them.

After the mortifying shock of this final "outing," many Jews turned to Zionism to supply their identity. But decades of war with intractable Arabs and suicide bombers have soured this utopian vision.

Other Jews turned to Marxism, which is a secular Messianism.²² Yet Russian Jews suffered under the Stalinist pogrom. So a Jewish-inspired ideology became just one more Jew-killing machine. And this painful irony embittered yet another utopian vision.

Some Jews have tried dodging the issue by proposing a dual covenant. And this compromise has recently received the endorsement of the Vatican.

The problem, however, is that the NT was Jewish before it was Christian. And the New Covenant is a covenant for Jews as well as Christians. There is no other way of reading the mission to the Jews in the Gospels and Acts, much less the redemptive-historical plot-lines in Romans or 2 Corinthians or Ephesians or Hebrews.

The Jews have suffered from a lingering and malingering identity crisis because they go out of their way to avoid the one anchor of Jewish identity. In the past, Christian apologetics has suffered from invoking a few isolated messianic proof texts. But messianic prophecy needs to be seen as a more organic and holistic whole. A Christian apologist should identify the key messianic motifs, and trace out their steady thematic progression.²³

²² Marx was an apostate Jew who heralded from a long line of Rabbis. Trotsky (b. Lev Davidovitch Bronstein) was another renegade Jew.

²³ Cf. "Messiah," *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 2:987-95.