

Morna D. Hooker, *New Wine in Old Bottles: A Discussion of Continuity and Discontinuity in Relation to Judaism and the Gospel*. The Ethel M. Wood Lecture 1984. Delivered at the Senate House, University of London on 14 February 1984. Pbk. pp.18.

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***New Wine in Old Bottles:  
A Discussion of Continuity and Discontinuity  
in Relation to Judaism and the Gospel***

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**The Ethel M. Wood Lecture 1984  
Delivered at the Senate House,  
University of London  
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‘No one pours new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine will be wasted, and the skins as well. New wine must be put into fresh wineskins’ (Matt. 9.17; Mark 2.22; Luke 5.37). This familiar parable is by no means as straightforward as it seems at first hearing. Clearly, it suggests the incompatibility of old and new, and the call for fresh wineskins to hold new wine implies that what is new is superior to what is old. Moreover, the setting of the parable, in a debate which contrasts the behaviour of Jesus’ disciples with that of other religious groups among the Jews suggests that we are meant to understand that the new wine of the Gospel cannot be contained within the confines of Judaism. Yet the loss of the wineskins is apparently as much of a disaster as the spillage of the wine. Matthew spells this out: ‘new wine must be put into fresh wineskins—that way, both the wine and the skins are preserved.’ As for Luke, his concern reaches not only to the old wineskins but to the old wine, for he adds a postscript to Jesus’ words to the effect that no one who has tasted old wine wants to drink new, since the old is better. And though connoisseurs of wine might agree with Luke’s assessment, it is a strangely conservative sentiment to find in Luke’s gospel—so strange, indeed, that commentators generally assume the statement to be ironic. How could Luke believe that the old wine of Judaism was preferable to the new wine of Christianity?

The ambivalent attitude towards what is old displayed in these different versions of the parable reflects an underlying tension which runs throughout much of the New Testament—the tension between old and new, between the beliefs and assumptions which the first Christians inherited from the past and the new insights of the Gospel, between the framework of ideas which formed part of their heritage and the events which made them think again about their understanding of God and his world. To what extent was the faith of the Church new? In what ways was it related to the past? These are crucial questions for our understanding of the New Testament and of early Christianity, but the problem which they attempt to tackle is by no means confined to the pages

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of the New Testament. The particular focus of our investigation this afternoon is the emergence of Christianity from Judaism, and the questions confront us there in a particularly

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acute form—but they are relevant to any period of the Church's history where past traditions prove inadequate to contain new insights. I do not mean to suggest, of course, that the situations are identical: for Christians, the events concerning Jesus remain unique, and cannot be explained simply by comparing them with other historical happenings. Yet Christians may well argue that continuing tensions between old and new are a sign of the ongoing activity of the Spirit. Certainly, in present-day debates about doctrine and hermeneutics, we find ourselves grappling with questions such as these: to what extent are the traditional ways of expressing the faith essential to it? How is the tradition that has been handed down from the past to be related to new ways of understanding the faith?

If such questions cause problems today, they must have been far more pressing in the early years of the Church. And though of course we are well aware of the clashes between Paul on the one hand and the so-called 'Judaizers' on the other, I suspect that we do not always appreciate the subtlety of the problem they faced—partly because we tend to put the protagonists in opposing camps, and forget that most of them had a foot in both camps. The dangers which confronted them were—on the one hand—of clinging too closely to past beliefs and practices, and on the other, of cutting loose from the past altogether.

Now the tendency from a very early stage and throughout the history of Christianity has been to stress the newness of the Christian revelation and therefore the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity. This is one of the inevitable consequences of the cleavage between the two religions: Judaism refused to accept Jesus as Messiah, Christians in turn denounced Judaism. The destruction of Jerusalem was seen as divine punishment; Jews became the scapegoats of Europe, and the blame for Jesus' death was laid at their feet. As a result, Christians forgot that most of the New Testament was written by men from within Judaism—who not only were themselves Jews, but saw Christian faith as orthodox Judaism, rather than as a separate religion. When we read Paul, and find him using the first person plural, we automatically assume that he means 'we Christians'; most of the time, in fact, he means, 'we Jews'. The gospels of Matthew and John show signs of being written for Jewish Christians who thought of themselves as true Jews—but who found themselves pushed out of Jewish synagogues, all the time protesting that they, not their opponents, were being true to the teaching of Moses. Their position was analogous to that of the early Methodist societies in this country in the eighteenth century, springing up within the Church of England, but finding it more and more

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impossible to stay there. Because our New Testament was written before the break between Jew and Christian, and because we look back at it from long after that break, we inevitably see

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Christianity as standing over against Judaism, instead of understanding it within the context of Judaism.

Another important factor which has led to a stress on discontinuity is the enormous influence exercised by Lutheran theology on biblical scholarship. For centuries, our understanding of Paul's theology has been dominated by the antithesis between Law and Gospel; Bultmann, for example, sees Paul as the great opponent of Law. Even the recent book by Professor E.P. Sanders,<sup>1</sup> with its sympathetic portrait of first-century Judaism, has a very unsympathetic portrait of Paul, and leaves him as much opposed to the Law as ever. Talk about the old and new covenants has emphasized the contrast between the two religions rather than the continuity. There have, of course, been reactions to all this. The biblical theology movement stressed the unity of biblical revelation and for a time the pendulum swung the other way. But the general tendency over the years has been to oppose old and new, Judaism and Christianity, Law and Gospel. As a result, the very word 'Law' has become for us a derogatory one; perhaps we should use the Jews' own term, 'Torah', to remind us that we are talking about a religious ideal, and not the caricature we have sometimes made of it.

This basic tendency to assume a cleavage between old and new affects our whole approach to the New Testament. An interesting example of this can be seen in critical work on the gospels. Attempting to recover the authentic words of Jesus, scholars devised certain criteria, by which they might be tested. The most important of these was the criterion of dissimilarity.<sup>2</sup> This particular test pushed the notion of discontinuity to the limits, for it required a process of what we may perhaps term 'double declutching': it assumed that the words we can attribute with confidence to Jesus himself are those which do not overlap either with the beliefs of contemporary Judaism or with those of the early Church. The absurdity of the method is self-evident (or so one would have thought): it can only produce a picture of a Jesus who has no roots in Judaism and no influence on the Christian community.<sup>3</sup> Because the notion of discontinuity is

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built into the method, its results inevitably give us a picture of discontinuity rather than continuity, and suggest not one gap but two between Judaism and the Church. Once again, there have been reactions to this approach. Jewish scholars, for example, remind us that Jesus was a Jew, but the more they do this the more they blame the writers of the New Testament for ignoring their past heritage and introducing what were essentially new notions: while they seek to narrow the gap between Judaism and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity remain as far apart as ever.

Our basic problem is, I believe, the difficulty of understanding what the authors of New Testament documents were trying to say in their own situation. We read the New Testament

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<sup>1</sup> *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London 1977.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of this method see N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, London 1967, pp.39-43.

<sup>3</sup> For criticism of this method, see M.D. Hooker, 'Christianity and Methodology', in *N.T.S.* 17, 1971, 480-7.

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inevitably in our own context—we read it, first of all, as ‘the New Testament’—that is, as the definitive statement of faith, the tradition from which Christians begin—whereas for those who wrote it, the beliefs they were setting out were the very opposite; they were new, daring, challenging, and rejected as heresy by those who began from what was then the accepted basis of faith, the Jewish scriptures. Our problem is to detach ourselves from a perspective in which Christian faith is the norm, and put ourselves back into a situation where Christians were seen as schismatics. But if we are to understand them, it is worth making the attempt, and asking the question—What were their problems? What were they trying to do? How did they relate their experience of Christ in the present with their beliefs about God’s activity in the past? I want to look at some of the ways in which they wrestled with this problem, remembering that their two ‘givens’ were, on the one hand, their experience of Christ, and on the other, their roots in Judaism.

The difficulty of deciphering the evidence is summed up for us in one sentence by Paul; in Rom. 10.4 he writes: ‘Christ is the end of the Law’. But the Greek *τέλος*, like the English ‘end’, is ambiguous, and can mean either ‘abolition’ or ‘fulfilment’. what does Paul mean? Does he regard the Gospel as being in opposition to the Law, or as its completion? In what sense does the Law come to an ‘end’ with Christ?

The earliest answer to this question must surely have been that Jesus was seen as the *fulfilment* of both Law and prophets. The idea that his life, teaching, death and resurrection were in accordance with scripture seems to have been the very earliest form of argument that was used to support the Gospel, and the very first line of defence in any apologetic. We hardly need to look at examples. The method was either to appeal to particular proof-texts, or to scripture in general: what happened in Christ was interpreted as

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being ‘according to the scriptures’. When appeal was made to particular proof-texts, then one could either quote chapter and verse, or weave the Old Testament passage into the narrative—sometimes so subtly that we, nineteen centuries later, do not always recognize the allusion. We need only compare the first two chapters of Matthew with the first two of Luke to find examples of these two approaches. Matthew quotes passages from the prophets, introducing them with the declaration that the gospel events took place in order to fulfil the prophets’ words; Luke tells the story of Jesus’ birth in language which is soaked in the vocabulary and style of the Septuagint. Whatever method was used, the purpose of the appeal to scripture was to demonstrate that God was at work in Christ, and that what he did—and even more mysteriously, what was done to him—were in accordance with God’s purpose.

Such an approach begins, of course, from the assumption that the Old Testament scriptures were the authoritative witness to God’s purpose, and the medium of God’s self-revelation to mankind. It means, also, that Christ is seen as the fulfilment of God’s purpose. The more these writers stressed the lines of continuity between their understanding of scripture and their experience of

Christ, the more they came to see Christ as the content of God's plan—a plan which is traced back not simply to the time of David, Israel's ideal king, but to Moses, the nation's first redeemer, to Abraham, the father of the nation, and finally to Adam. Jesus is thus seen as part of God's plan from the very beginning.

When We talk about Jesus being seen as the fulfilment of scripture, we tend to think in terms of the fulfilment of prophecy. To judge from the evidence of the New Testament, however, it seems that the first Christians may have seen things somewhat differently. For a start, in understanding Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophets, they seem to have been thinking less in terms of straightforward 'predictions' than in terms of Jesus 'matching-up' to what was written in the prophets—as though, with an overhead projector, one were sliding one transparency over another until the two patterns merge. They began, that is, with their experience of Jesus, and looked for illumination in the prophets—and sometimes they found illumination in what appear to us to be strange places. Secondly, they seem to have thought of Jesus as 'fulfilling the Law' as well as the prophets. Indeed, from their point of view, this may well have been the more important. And though the evangelists show Jesus in constant conflict with scribes and Pharisees over his interpretation of the Law, the point of these skirmishes again and again is to prove that it is Jesus, not the Jewish religious authorities, who is faithful to the Law. Mark sets the scene at the beginning of his gospel, when Jesus sends the leper to offer the sacrifice

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prescribed by Moses (Mark 1.44); and throughout Mark's story, Jesus turns the tables on his opponents (who are supposedly the upholders of the Law) by quoting the Law, and showing how his own teaching is in keeping with its demands. In Matthew, Jesus' teaching on the Law in the Sermon on the Mount begins with the words: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished (Matt. 5.17f). Luke pushes the theme back to the very beginning of his story, and relates how Jesus' parents circumcised him and presented sacrifices in the temple, and so 'performed everything according to the Law of the Lord' (Luke 1.39).

Clearly the evangelists were concerned to stress the idea that Jesus fulfilled the Law. The fact that many of these passages occur in conflict situations suggests that there were those outside the Christian community who denied what is here affirmed. To 'scribes and Pharisees', Jesus was a lawbreaker—and worse, for he had apparently dared to attack Moses' teaching. To such accusations, the saying in Matthew 5.17 is clearly relevant: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets: I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.' Similarly, v.19: 'Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven'. It is often suggested that these words reflect internal Church disputes, and that it is the Hellenistic wing of the Church, perhaps Paul himself, that is here under attack. But since the paragraph ends with the demand that Jesus' disciples must be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, it looks very much as though the accusations came

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from Jewish opponents. And the Christian response to these accusations was to say: ‘we are in no way unfaithful to the Law; neither was Jesus unfaithful. We stand within the tradition of Judaism—and at the end of the day, we shall be seen to be more faithful to Moses than you.’ This is precisely the kind of argument one expects to be used by a minority group trying to establish its own position over against the parent body: ‘it is we’, they say, ‘not you, who are being faithful to the traditions of the past; it is you, not we, who have gone astray.’

We see, then, that the belief that Jesus is the fulfilment of scripture can be conveyed in other ways than simply by quoting proof-texts. I have referred already to the way in which Luke weaves scriptural echoes into his account of the births of John and Jesus. His purpose seems to be to persuade us that he, too, like the writers of the Old Testament scriptures, is writing

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Salvation-history—writing about God’s activity among his people. And he has another way of making the same point—namely, his frequent references to the Spirit of God; they establish that it is God himself who is at work in Jesus and his followers. Luke has an apologetic task; he has to persuade his readers that the story he tells—the story about Jesus, and the story about the activities of the apostles—are part of the same story which has its beginning in the Old Testament. What happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and what is continuing to happen in the life of the Christian community are, for Luke, all part of God’s dealings with mankind: appeals to scripture and to the work of the Holy Spirit both showed that this was so. Yet commentators do not always appreciate Luke’s own concern with continuity; indeed, the influential book by Conzelmann<sup>4</sup> suggests the very opposite, since he argues that Luke divides time into three distinct epochs—the period of the old Testament, the period of Jesus, and the period of the Church. Whether or not that is a correct inference from Luke’s two-volume work I am not sure; but if it is, it should not be stressed at the expense of Luke’s emphasis on continuity, for he has gone out of his way, in the opening verses of both his volumes, to link first Jesus with all that happened before him, and then the events concerning the apostles with Jesus himself.

And if we want another example of the way in which the continuity with the past was important for the evangelists we can turn to the Fourth Gospel, where in the Prologue John underlines the theme in his own highly distinctive way, by showing that it was the same word of God spoken at the beginning of time which came again in the prophets, and finally in Jesus, the word made flesh.

In exploring this theme of continuity I have begun with the gospels rather than Paul, even though they were written later than Paul’s letters, because of the difficulty in analysing Paul’s view; but it is clear that he, too, understands Jesus to be the fulfilment of God’s promises, and uses Old Testament proof-texts to support his argument. Indeed, Paul uses the Old Testament as a quarry from which to gather ammunition, and he does this especially when he is arguing with those who

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<sup>4</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit*, Tübingen 1954; E. Tr. *The Theology of St Luke*, London 1960.

wish to impose circumcision and observance of the Law on his converts. Just as we find Jesus, in the gospels, quoting the Law in arguing with those who claim to be upholding the Law, so, too, Paul appeals to the Law to show that it supports his case, and not that of his opponents. Whatever opposition there may be between Law and Gospel, it has to be understood within this framework

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of the continuity of God's promises. But Paul, like Jesus, is accused of teaching what is contrary to the Law, and he indignantly rejects the charge. 'Is the Law contrary to God's promises?' he asks—'μη γένοιτο—God forbid!' (Gal. 3.21). 'Do we overthrow the Law by faith? μη γένοιτο—God forbid! We uphold the Law' (Rom. 3.31).

To spell out all this is perhaps merely to state the obvious: of course these New Testament writers stressed, in their various ways, that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises—and if we were to look at later documents, at the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, or I Peter, we should find a similar use of scripture as proof-texts, and the same conviction that they had been fulfilled in Christ. But it is as well to recognize what is happening. It was not that the first Christians inherited some kind of messianic 'check-list', and ticked off the items one by one: first-century Judaism did not have a ready-made list of messianic prophecies which had to be fulfilled by anyone who was a candidate for the title—there was no such list,<sup>5</sup> no such prophecies, and come to that, there probably wasn't a title of 'Messiah' either. Christians began from their experience of Jesus, and looked for ways of expressing what that meant. Old Testament passages which could be used as proof-texts were an obvious source; so were what we call the messianic titles, which probably weren't ready-made titles at all; so were various familiar symbols and images. They used

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these texts and terms, not simply because they were familiar parts of their thought-world, but because, in a variety of ways, they served to express the belief that Jesus was the fulfilment of Israel's hopes. The idea that there was a ready-made 'identikit' picture of the coming Messiah, waiting to be filled out, is the result of reading back our own ideas. At this point, the so-called 'biblical theologians' were wrong, because they misunderstood the significance of the emphasis

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<sup>5</sup> A possible exception to this is the so-called 'Messianic Anthology' or 'Testimonia' found at Qumran (4Q 175), consisting almost entirely of Old Testament texts. However, the three 'messianic' texts which are quoted seem to refer to three different figures—a prophet, a king, and a priest; the various prophecies do not supply a 'job-description' for the 'Messiah', but evidence to back up the Community's expectations of several leaders. Moreover, the purpose of the collection seems to be primarily to stress the opposition which these leaders will meet and the punishment which will overtake all those who withstand the Lord and his people. It is possible that the Teacher of Righteousness was thought to be the fulfilment of all three figures, but if so, then the Old Testament quotations are being used in a way similar to that in which such quotations are employed in the New Testament—as a way of spelling out the significance of the Teacher of Righteousness, not the messianic hopes for the future: in other words, the starting-point is past experience of a particular individual, and not a job-description which candidates for messiahship were required to match.

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on continuity. Its thrust is from the experience of Jesus back to the past, rather than from the Old Testament to the New.

Now one of the interesting aspects of all this is that images, symbols, titles and proof-texts culled from the Old Testament are applied by these writers not only to Jesus himself, but to the community which believes in him. Indeed, some of them are used both of Jesus and of the Church; and some bind the two together. The reason, of course, is that the early community was very much aware of itself as true Israel; we tend to speak of the new Israel—but that is because we have severed our cords with what we call ‘old Israel’. But for the earliest Jewish Christians, Jesus was God’s anointed, the fulfilment of God’s promises to his people, Israel. If the nation’s religious authorities had rejected him, they would be replaced; if Israel refused to respond, that did not mean that God’s promises had failed: dead branches can be lopped off and new ones grafted in, but the tree remains; the tenants of the vineyard are driven out because of their villainy, but new ones will be appointed; the temple is destroyed, but it is rebuilt after three days; those who should have sat down to the messianic banquet are thrown out, but the feast goes on and vagabonds are brought in to feast instead; the sons of Abraham inherit the promises, but what a very odd lot these sons of Abraham are—Gentiles as well as Jews—and what links them to Abraham is not circumcision, but faith. If Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s promises to his people, then those who believe in him must be the inheritors of those promises, and the true people of God; the new temple is built on him; the new sons of Abraham are sons only when they live in Christ. Arguments about Christology and about the identity of the Christian community inevitably belong together.

So the first answer that we find in the New Testament to the question—In what sense if Christ the ‘end’ of the Law?—is that he fulfils it.

In apparent contrast, however, we have passages in which Law and Gospel appear to be opposed. The most obvious examples occur in the writings of Paul, since he argues the case for Christ as the

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replacement for the Law. ‘What the Law could not do’, he declares, ‘God has done by sending his son’ (Rom. 8.3). It is impossible to gain righteousness before God by the works of the Law; righteousness comes only through union with Christ, and by faith in him. God’s people are no longer defined as those who accept the Law and receive the mark of circumcision; they are those who are in Christ, and who have been baptized into the community of men and women who believe in him. Reading Paul’s words from a Gentile perspective, we are likely to see this argument in terms of stark alternatives—Law on the one hand opposed to the Gospels on the other; and because Paul is always waging war with Judaizers of some kind when he speaks of the role of the Law, his words naturally come across in this way. In Galatians, in particular, the Law itself appears to be opposing God! But this is only because of the weakness of the flesh: the Law, which is in itself good, divine in origin, has as it were been hijacked by alien powers.

Nevertheless, Paul never finally surrenders the Law. How can he? The Law was delivered by God to Moses on Mount Sinai; its commandments are holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7.12); the Law expressed God's will. But it cannot save; it cannot make men and women righteous in the sight of God. But since the Law comes from God, it must have a place in the divine plan, and Paul therefore looks for another function for the Law. In both Galatians and Romans, he explains this in terms of an interim measure; the Law was necessary, he argues, between the giving of the promises and their fulfilment. Why the Law was necessary, he does not really explain satisfactorily. The Law, he suggests, was our custodian—in charge, that is, of the Jews—until the time was ripe for Christ to come. Paul's problem, quite simply, is that the Law is there, and he cannot deny its divine origin without denying everything that has spoken to him of God in the past. He has to weld together this heritage with his new experience of God in Christ.

We have noted already the passage in Romans (3.31) where Paul indignantly denies that he is destroying the Law; he is not overthrowing the Law, but upholding it. Many commentators hold that Paul's attitude to the Law is inconsistent, and varies from one epistle to another.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not they are right, it is unlikely that Paul would affirm in Rom. 10.4 what he so vehemently denies a few chapters earlier, in Rom. 3.31: 'Do we overthrow the Law by faith? μή γένοιτο—God forbid! We uphold the Law.'

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When he describes Christ as the end of the Law in 10.4, therefore, he cannot be thinking of a fundamental antithesis between Law and Gospel—though we find no less an exegete than Käsemann insisting that he is.<sup>7</sup> Yet it seems clear from the context that Paul's meaning is that Christ achieves—finally and fully—what the Law was able to do only partially and temporarily. The passage in Romans 10 is an exposition of Deuteronomy 30, and it is a typical New Testament 'take-over bid' for an Old Testament text. What was originally said about God's Law is now interpreted as referring to Christ, not to the commands given on Sinai: the word which God sets in the mouths and hearts of his people is no longer interpreted as the word of command, but as the word of the Gospel. In that sense, the Law is indeed ousted. Yet it is the Law itself—the book of Deuteronomy—which is being quoted! We see here how Paul understands the continuing function of the Law: it is the witness to Christ. In other words, even when Paul appears to be attacking the Law, he maintains that he is upholding its true meaning; Christ is still being seen as the fulfilment of the Law, even when he replaces it. God's revelation in the past

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. H. Räisänen, 'Paul's Theological Difficulties with the Law', in *Studia Biblica* 1978, III, J.S.N.T. Supplement, Sheffield 1980, pp.301-20.

<sup>7</sup> E. Käsemann, *An die Römer*, 4th, rev. edn., Tübingen 1980, in *Loc.*; E.Tr. *Commentary on Romans*, London 1980, from 1st German ed. Käsemann is careful to distinguish between Paul's own antithesis of Law and Gospel, and the dialectic of a later period. Nevertheless, he dismisses all attempts to interpret τέλος as 'goal' as unjustified. He points in particular to the idea that the Law is a 'custodian', whose role ends when Christ comes (Gal. 3.24; cf. Rom. 7.1-6). Even in Gal., however, Paul dismisses any suggestion that the Law is 'against God's promises' (3.21), and introduces the image of the παιδαγωγός with the statement that scripture imprisoned everyone under sin in order that the promises might be fulfilled through faith in Jesus Christ. However negative the Law's role may be, it still has a positive purpose.

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was not inconsistent with his revelation in Christ, but was pointing towards what happened in him. Paul's argument is therefore based on the Law itself, for we are still arguing within the context of those who take the Jewish scriptures as authoritative; the crucial difference between Jew and Christian is the way in which those scriptures are understood and interpreted.

Commentators on Paul do not always appreciate that he remained a convinced Jew, and believed that he was being faithful to his Jewish heritage—and that meant, of course, to the Torah. It is true that his commission to evangelize the Gentiles led him to regard the Mosaic covenant as something binding on the Jewish people only, and something, moreover, which had been a temporary

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measure. But long before the Mosaic covenant, God had made certain promises to Abraham, and these have now been fulfilled in Christ. Of course there is continuity! God does not go back on his promises.

It seems, then, that even the apparent antithesis between Christ and the Law which serves to spell out the notion of Christ as the replacement of the Law should be seen in terms of continuity rather than of opposition. The suggestion that τέλος should be translated 'goal' in Rom. 10.4 is an appropriate one (despite the strenuous opposition it has aroused) since it conveys admirably the tension between negative and positive in Paul's thought: if Christ is the goal of the Law, then the Law itself is designed with built-in obsolescence. When Christ arrives, the Law is at an end, not because Christ destroys what the Law stood for, but because he achieves the Law's aims.

Paul argued his case with vigour and passion, but he was by no means alone in his stance. What he did in his way, other writers did in theirs. The author of the Fourth Gospel, for example, vigorous in his condemnation of 'the Jews', claims for Jesus everything which had once been claimed for the Law. He does this by his use of imagery, since most of the symbols he applies to Jesus have their origins in Jewish beliefs about the Law. The word which was once spoken in the Law is now embodied in him: he is the light, the life, the way, the truth, the living manna, the source of water. Equally significant, the worship which had once been centred in Jerusalem is now focussed on Jesus: all the significance pertaining to the various religious festivals is now subsumed in Jesus. The Fourth Evangelist claims that truth and revelation and communion with God are to be found in Jesus, and not in the commands and ritual set out in the Torah. But this antithesis makes sense only within a context which accepts the validity of the Torah itself. John's argument is with Jews, who cling to the traditions of the past; but their trouble—according to John—is that they do not understand their own scriptures. 'You search the scriptures', says Jesus to the Jews, 'because you think that you have eternal life in them—but they bear witness to me ... if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote of me' (John 5.37ff.). The argument, therefore, is not between Moses and Christ: Moses is the witness to Christ, and not his opponent. In John, as in Paul, and as in the Synoptic Gospels, the argument is about how one

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interprets Moses; what John does is to hold together the traditions of the past and the new experience of God's grace in Christ.

And so we could go on. But already, we are being pushed, by both

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these lines of enquiry—both by the arguments which stress the continuity between old and new by seeing Jesus as the *fulfilment* of scripture, and by those which suggest a certain discontinuity between them by seeing Jesus as the *replacement* of the Law—to our third theme: this is the superiority of Christ to the Law.

In a sense, this is not really a separate theme at all. The superiority of Christ seems to have been implied in some of the passages we have considered already, and this not merely because what is newer is necessarily better—indeed, as we shall see in a moment, from the Jewish point of view, what was earlier was superior: as Luke puts it, the old wine is better than the new. The idea that Jesus fulfils various Old Testament promises does not necessarily in itself suggest that he is greater than they; but once we move into arguments that in some sense he replaces the Law, and that the Law witnesses to him, then his superiority is clearly implied—for why do we need a replacement unless it is in fact better than the old? Any manufacturer who improves his product has to substantiate his claim to have produced a superior version of it. New 'Tide' always washes even cleaner than old 'Tide'—a remarkable feat, since for years we will have been assured that the original product could not be bettered. What had once seemed to us—in our ignorance—perfect, now bears testimony to the superior quality of a product whose performance is even better. And so the Law, once seen as the embodiment of God's self-revelation and of his will for mankind, gives way to Christ, and plays a subsidiary role as witness to his superiority. It was a bold conclusion for those brought up within the Jewish faith.

One of the notable passages where this theme is worked out is 2 Corinthians 3. At first sight, Paul appears to be contrasting Moses and Christ. In fact he is comparing Moses with himself—to the former's detriment!—a bold, indeed a courageous, thing to do. Like Moses, Paul and his fellow apostles are ministers, but of a new, superior dispensation. Paul spells out the differences between them in a series of contrasting images: stone tablets are contrasted with living hearts; the carved letter with the Spirit; death with life; condemnation with righteousness; the face concealed under a veil with an open face. The passage suggests that Paul sees a clear antithesis between the two. But that would be to misunderstand his position, for to Paul the continuity is as important as the contrast, and what binds together Moses' ministry with that of Paul is the theme of glory. True, Paul regards Moses' glory as inferior, since it was only temporary: the glory which shone from Moses' face when he came down from Mount Sinai faded away, whereas Paul's glory grows brighter and brighter. Nevertheless, there is a link between the

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two, since the ultimate source of the glory reflected by both Paul and Moses is the same: the glory which Moses glimpsed on Sinai was the self-revelation of God—and that was the glory which was embodied in Jesus, and is now reflected by those who gaze at him. This whole passage is a good exposition of the ideas that we have been exploring: there is a continuity in God's self-revelation to his people, and it is within that context of continuity that we have to see the contrast between the dispensation of the Law, which led to death, and the dispensation of the Spirit, which leads to life. It is significant, too, that the contrast drawn here is not between Moses and Christ, but between Moses and Paul. The reason is Christ's superiority to Moses: he is, as it were, one higher up the scale, since he is not simply one who reflects God's glory—though he does that (2 Cor. 4.6)—but is himself the source of glory; he is the true image of God (4.4), and the light which shines from his face is the creative light of God himself, which shone forth on the day of creation (4.6). So the glory which is seen in Jesus is regarded by Paul as primary, and this is why it is superior to the second-hand glory or revelation mediated through Moses. What Moses received was temporary, but what Jesus gives is permanent. But does Paul think of Christ himself as the source of the glory seen by Moses? Does his permanence stretch backwards through time as well as *forwards*? The link with creation suggests that this is indeed the way in which Paul's mind is moving. The logical implication of his argument is that Christ is not only superior to Moses but prior to Moses; but this he does not spell out.

There is, however, an interesting parallel with the imagery used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 in the language of the first chapter or the Fourth Gospel. Here, once again, we find the theme of glory: 'the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that belongs to one who is an only-begotten son of his father, full of grace and truth' (John 1.14). Once again, we have a contrast with Moses: the Law came through Moses, but grace and truth—qualities which are referred to in Exodus 34 in an account of God's self-revelation—have come through Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> But once again, this contrast must be seen within the context of continuity: the word which became flesh among us in the person of Jesus, whose glory we have seen, is the word which was in the beginning, the word which was with God, and which was the source of light and life. The glory which shone forth in Jesus, who makes the Father known to mankind, is the

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glory which no man has ever seen—not even Moses, who glimpsed only a rear view as God passed by on the mountain (Ex. 33.22f.)—for Jesus embodies the grace and truth which belong to God himself. The parallels between 2 Corinthians 3 and John 1 are intriguing—especially since they both appeal to the same old Testament texts, Genesis 1 and Exodus 33-34. But John spells out what was not made explicit in 2 Corinthians: he identifies this self-expression of God—his glory or word—with the word made flesh in Jesus; the light which shone at creation, the word which spoke at the beginning, is the light which shines in Jesus, and the word embodied in him. If Jesus is superior to the Law, he is also prior to the Law; it is the Law which reflects his glory, and not vice versa.

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<sup>8</sup> Ex. 34.7. Cf. M.D. Hooker, in 'John's Prologue and the Messianic Secret', *N.T.S.* 21, 1974, p.54.

Similar claims that Jesus is not only continuous with God's past revelation but superior to everything that has been experienced previously appear elsewhere in the New Testament. In the opening verses, of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, we are told: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world: he reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.' Or again, in Col. 1.15ff., Christ is said to be 'the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' It is no accident that these passages are examples of so-called 'Wisdom Christology', and that the ideas used here have been traced back to the descriptions of Wisdom in places such as Proverbs 8, Wisdom 7 and Ecclesiasticus 24. But why did these passages come to be used of Christ? Was it perhaps because already in Judaism the identification had been made between the Law and the figure of Wisdom? The Law had already been interpreted as God's word, as the expression of God's glory, as the emanation of his splendour, and as present with God from the foundations of the world. If Christians were now claiming that in Jesus God reveals more of his character than he had done in either the prophets or the Mosaic covenant, then certainly everything that had hitherto been said about the Torah must be said about him—and more. If Jesus is understood to be God's supreme and final self-revelation, then what came previously must be seen as partial and incomplete. Law and prophets both declared the word of God, yet they were derivative, secondary, and Christ is the authentic norm. He represents God's plan and purpose

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from the beginning—and inevitably, one begins to speak about his priority, and his pre-existence. Jesus is God's true image, the source of glory, and whatever other glimpses of God's glory have been caught hitherto are secondary to God's self-revelation in him. It is possible, even though he does not spell this out, that Paul believes that the glory Moses glimpsed on Mount Sinai was the glory of Christ himself. Certainly in 1 Corinthians 10 he says that the Rock from which the Israelites drank was Christ; this is an allusion to the rock which was struck by Moses in the wilderness in order to provide water for Israel, and which, according to Jewish legend, followed the people on their wanderings. Water is a familiar symbol for the Torah in rabbinic writings, so that the 'supernatural drink' from which the Israelites drank would normally be understood as a reference to the Torah; but Paul now identifies the source of this 'supernatural drink'—the Rock—with Christ.<sup>9</sup> Once again he seems to have taken over a familiar image in order to claim the superiority of Christ, but the logic of his argument suggests—whether intentionally or not—that Christ is prior, as well as superior. And if we turn back to the pages of the Fourth Gospel, we find not only the opening declaration that the Word was in the beginning,

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<sup>9</sup> Philo identifies the rock with Wisdom. See *Leg. Alleg.* 11 86; *Quod det. potiori insid.* 115.

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but later, in 12.41, an exposition of Isaiah's vision in the temple which explains that what Isaiah in fact saw was the glory of Jesus.

In this third approach to the question—how is Christ the end of the Law"—the theme of continuity has, as it were, been turned inside out. No longer is Christ seen simply as the fulfilment of scripture—as the one to whom Law and prophets point forward. He is seen now as the source of revelation, as the blue-print of creation. No longer does scripture validate Christ—rather, he validates scripture: he is the reality, and scripture is secondary to him, for the word of God is enshrined in Jesus, and not in the pages of the sacred text. Jesus is now seen, not so much as the goal of God's revelation, as its origin; not simply as the content of scripture but as the one who inspires its understanding. When we look at Christ, declares Paul, we understand the real significance of the scriptures, and the Spirit writes in our hearts the truth to which they bear witness.

If we attempt to put ourselves back in the shoes of these men, we can understand the logic of what they were saying. Of course they believed that there was continuity between the old and the new; the only alternative was to attribute what had been under-

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stood as God's self-revelation in the past to some other god: that was Marcion's solution—and his interpretation was equally logical, beginning from where he did. Seen from outside the context of Jewish Christianity, the claims which were made for Christ seem, inevitably, to denigrate the Law. Yet they were not a denigration, for the Law is God's Law, and its commandments, as Paul affirms (Rom. 7.12), are 'holy, just and good'. Has the Law, then, been dethroned? There is a sense in which it has—but not if that image suggests to us, as it well might, a coup in which one ruler topples another. A better analogy might be that of a dowager duchess, who retains her title and her dignity when her son and daughter-in-law take over and become the new Duke and Duchess; although she is replaced, she is nevertheless still honoured, and in a paradoxical way finds fulfilment in those who succeed her. From the perspective of a later time, the antitheses of Matthew 5 sound like an attack on the Law: 'You have heard that it was said of old... but I say to you...'. Yet they are not an attack, as the introduction in verses 17-21 makes clear. From within the Jewish Christian community, those six antitheses made perfect sense: of course Matthew did not mean to suggest that Jesus had attacked the teaching of Moses! But the revelation which came through Moses was only partial, and now God's word is being spoken clearly and directly by one who is greater than Moses. Matthew certainly does not suggest that God has changed his mind, or has decided to replace an imperfect Law with a 'revised' version; nor does he suggest that Jesus is giving a new Law; rather, because he is superior to Moses, his words are more direct, more authoritative, and his presentation of God's demands makes no concession to human weakness.

Similar arguments go on elsewhere in the New Testament—though we do not always appreciate what is happening. In Acts 7, we find Stephen being accused by the Jews of teaching against the

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Law and the temple. Commentators frequently complain that Stephen's speech is irrelevant to the charges brought against him; in fact, it is highly relevant, for what he does, according to Luke's account, is to turn the tables on his accusers. It is they, he declares, who are disobedient to God's commands, delivered on Mount Sinai, and it is they who do not realize that the temple is only a symbol of something much greater, whereas the Christian community are obedient to God's commands and worship God as he should be worshipped. Taken out of its original context, Stephen's speech does sound like an attack on the Law and the temple, but in fact both are put in their place, and seen as symbols of something greater than themselves, which Christians claim to have experienced in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

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But the old bottles of Judaism could not contain the new wine of the Gospel. The pity is, not that the wine was lost—for it was poured into fresh bottles—but that the old bottles were thrown away. When Christianity finally broke away from the parent body, then it lost part of its Jewish heritage. And when the Jewish context of the early debates was forgotten, then the claims being made for Jesus took on new interpretations; the attacks on Jewish opponents came to sound like total condemnation. What had been tension became antithesis, and the opposition between Christianity and Judaism was complete. The irony is that in time some of the fresh wineskins themselves became old and brittle, unable to contain the heady wine of the Gospel. But that is another story, and a problem for another lecture altogether.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. G. Stanton, 'Stephen in Lucan Perspective', *Studia Biblica* 1978, III, J.S.N.T. Supplement, Sheffield 1980, pp.345-60.