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Sociology of Religion as a Recapitulation of Christian Replacement Theology: Max Weber and the Prophetic Roots of Western Rationalism

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the dependence of current sociological efforts towards explaining the rise of western rationalism on Christian replacement theology. Replacement theology is the view that Jesus' redeeming sacrifice reported in the Gospels superseded and replaced Judaism because it made universal the access to divine grace, which had before been restricted to an ascriptive "chosen people". I argue that this theological thesis lies at the root of Weber's view that the pariah condition peculiar to the Jewish people made the Jews - unlike Paul's missionary work - unable to diffuse the "rational conduct of life" which had been established through the (Hebrew) prophetic doctrine of a universal God.

Keywords: Sociology of religion; Occidental rationalism; Hebraic prophecy; Christian theology.

RESUMO

Desde os escritos seminais de Max Weber, a sociologia da religião tem retratado a profecia hebraica como a própria matriz do racionalismo ocidental, ao mesmo tempo em que lhe tem atribuído a promessa de um futuro no qual Israel prevaleceria sobre todas as outras nações. Após a experiência do exílio babilônico, essa promessa teria transformado os judeus em um "povo-pária", auto-segregado, ritualista, legalista, orientado por uma ética dual e, como tal, incapaz de conferir uma dinâmica universalista ao monoteísmo ético peculiar a seu próprio Livro sagrado. A profecia hebraica teria, nessa perspectiva, dado início a um processo evolutivo que somente o Novo Testamento, com sua doutrina da salvação universal, via sacrifício do Redentor, teria sido capaz de levar adiante. Argumenta-se que tal linha de raciocínio, que se encontra na base de todo o empenho, de matriz weberiana, em explicar a evolução da ética ocidental, se desenvolveu no interior de um arcabouço cuja natureza é teológica; mais precisamente, nos marcos da "teologia cristã da superação", assim chamada por postular que o Novo Testamento superou o judaísmo ao universalizar o acesso à graça divina que este último havia restringido a um pretenso "povo escolhido".

Palavras-chave: Sociologia da religião; Racionalismo ocidental; Profecia hebraica; Teologia cristã.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis les écrits séminaux de Max Weber, la sociologie de la religion traite la prophétie hébraïque comme la propre matrice du rationalisme occidental, en même temps qu'elle lui attribue la promesse d'un futur dans lequel Israël prévaudrait sur toutes les autrres nations. Suite à l'exil babylonien, cette promesse aurait transformé les juifs en un "peuple-paria", auto-ségrégué, ritualiste, légaliste, orienté par una éthique dualiste et, en tant que tel, incapable de conférer une dynamique universaliste au monothéisme éthique propre à son Livre sacré. La prophétie hébraïque aurait, suivant cette perspective, été à l'origine d'un processus évolutif qui n'aurait été mené à bon terme que par le Nouveau Testament, avec sa doctrine de salut universel par le sacrifice du Rédempteur. Nous défendons qu'une telle ligne de pensée – qui se trouve à la base de tout l'effort, de matrice webérienne – s'est, en expliquant l'évolution de l'éthique occidentale, développée à l'intérieur d'une structure de nature théologique et, plus précisement, suivant les indicateurs de la "théologie chrétienne de surpassement", qui se nomme ainsi par le fait de soutenir que le Nouveau Testament a supplanté le judaïsme en mondialisant l'accès à la grâce divine que ce dernier avait limité à un soit-disant "peuple élu".

Mots-clés: Sociologie de la religion; Racionalisme occidental; Prophétie hébraïque; Théologie chrétienne.

> "In all times there has been but one means of breaking the power of magic and establishing a rational conduct of life; this means is great rational prophecy"[1]

> "Prophecies have released the world from magic and in doing so have created the basis for our modern science and technology, and for capitalism." [2]

Since Weber's seminal writings, the sociology of religion has developed a rather curious view of the historical and cultural significance of Hebrew prophecy. On the one hand, it has been seen as the intellectual enterprise that generated the uniqueness of Western civilization by conceiving the overarching idea of a universal God and deriving from it the conception, alien to "all genuine Asiatic thought," that "through simple behavior addressed to the

[1] M. Weber. *General Economic History* (London: Transactions Publishers, 1993), p. 362.
[2] M. Weber, *id. ibid.*

'demands of the day' one may achieve salvation."[3] On the other hand, to Hebrew prophecy has been attributed the promise of a future in which Israel would dominate all other nations. After the devastating experience of the Babylonian exile, this promise would have turned the Jews into a self-segregated, resentful, ritualistic, legalistic "pariah-people," guided by a "dual ethic" and therefore unable to stick to, let alone diffuse, the "rational conduct of life" that had been established through the prophetic doctrine of a universal God. This view implies that whereas pre-exilic Israelite prophecy started the process through which the distinctive, rational features of the western way of leading life were formed, the pariah condition peculiar to post-exilic Jewish people prevented the continuity of the process, although it was not interrupted for good due to the subsequent advent of Christianity.

In this paper, I argue that this line of reasoning, which has been the underpinning of the entire Weberian effort towards explaining the rise of western rationalism, amounts to a secularized version of Christian theology: more precisely, to what the Christian theologian Rosemary Ruether has called the "theology of supersession," or "replacement theology."[4] Replacement theology is the view that Jesus' redeeming sacrifice reported in the Gospels superseded and replaced Judaism because it made universal the access to divine grace, which had before been restricted to an ascriptive "chosen people". According to this view, which can be traced back to the patristic apologist Justin Martyr (100-165), the Jewish scriptures had never had any intrinsic theological significance; the saga of the people of Israel reported in the Old Testament was merely an allegory of Jesus' timeless presence in the world. Although replacement theology has been seriously revised, even within Christian thought, it has nevertheless remained as something like a meta-theoretical framework within which current sociologically-oriented discussions on the role played by Hebrew prophecy and early Christianity in the rise of western rationalism have taken place.

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[3] See M. Weber, *The Religion of India* (New York: Free Press, 1960), p. 332, 342. Weber stresses that this conception "lies at the basis of *all the specifically occidental* significance of 'personality,'" since "it is in a trans-worldly realm of the salvation from transience that all highest interests of Asia are located and therewith 'personality' also finds its worth." (p. 339).

[4] R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide. The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1974).

As far as I know, the most finished version of the Weberian thesis that the replacement of a Jewish particularism by Christian universalism constitutes a crucial turning point in the development of western rationalism is found in *The Rise of Western Rationalism*, by the German sociologist Wolfgang Schluchter.[5] I had better allow Schluchter to speak for himself:

> (...) the decisive innovation of ancient Judaism was the idea of a transcendent creator god, who had established a good order to which human beings must submit. On the basis of this ethical monotheism social action could be oriented toward the notion of a political and social revolution willed by God, and the world could be comprehended as an historical phenomenon which was destined to be replaced by the divine order. However, the transformation of the Judaic oath-bound community into the Jewish pariah-people [a process that allegedly started in early sixtieth century B.C.E., prior to the Babylonian captivity, and finished when the Jews returned to their homeland, after being freed by the Persians] removed the universalistic dynamic from this idea. It became part of a morality distinguishing the in-group from the out-group and was believed to be addressed primarily to an ascriptive "chosen people."[6]

But Judaism was not all, for, as Schluchter reminds us, there was also, by contrast, Hellenic intellectual culture, which devised

> the idea of an intelligible 'natural' order, to which gods and human beings must submit equally. This cognitive universalism permitted the orientation of action towards the idea of a general just order. However the polis realized this idea of political and social life only in a very limited manner and religious life remained shaped by the polytheist religiosity of the mysteries in spite of the rise of 'universal' gods. [7]

The contrast between Jewish and Hellenic cultures called for a synthesis, which would have emerged in the missionary work of Paul by the middle of the first century. In both Weber's and Schluchter's views, Paul's mission appears as a very decisive moment in the evolution of western ethics. With the help of the figure of the Savior, who remits the sins of whoever believes in his divine and messianic nature, Paul, according to Schluchter,

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[5] *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental Hi*story (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), first published in German in 1979. See also his *Rationalism, Religion and Domination*: *A Weberian Perspective* (University of California Press, 1989). I cannot fail to mention that Schluchter does not conceal his debt to Parsons, especially to Parsons' discussion of Israel and Greece as "germ" societies, in his *Societies, Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

[6] W. Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism*, cited, p. 152.

[7] W. Schluchter, op. cit, p. 152.

suspended the Mosaic Law; he "broke through the ascriptive confines of Jewish ethical monotheism," or, as Weber himself would put it in his *Ancient Judaism*, Paul emancipated everyday life "from the ritual prescriptions of the Torah, which were the underpinning for the caste-like segregation of the Jews,"[8] and provided a new, non-magical basis for Hellenic religiosity by "placing the suffering, death and resurrection of the savior in the context of ethical monotheism."[9]

According to this rather Hegelian elucidation, the *Hebrew Bible* should be credited with having instituted what may be called the realm of legality, that is, an ethics based on externally imposed concrete norms, in contrast to the *New Testament*, which, insofar as it had rejected typically middle-class urban Jewish intellectualism,[10] and highlighted, in its place, the importance of inwardness, instituted the realm of morality, that is, an ethics based on internalized abstract principles. Paul is portrayed as the great architect of this transition. Weber himself described this putative transition in very graphic terms. "By the aid of a dialectic that only a rabbi could have", he says, Paul

> here and there broke through what was more distinctive and effective in the Jewish law, namely the tabooistic norms and the unique messianic promises. Since this taboos and promises linked the whole religious worth of the Jews to their pariah situation, Paul's breakthrough was fateful in its effect. Paul accomplished this breakthrough by interpreting these promises as having been partly fulfilled and partly abrogated by the birth of Christ. He triumphantly employed the highly impressive proof that the patriarchs of Israel had lived in accordance with God's will long before the issuance of the Jewish taboos and messianic promises, showing that they found blessedness through faith, which was the surety of God's election.
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> The dynamic power behind the incomparable missionary labors of Paul was his offer to the Jews of a tremendous release, the release provided by the consciousness of having escaped the fate of pariah status. A Jew could henceforth be a Greek among Greeks as well as a Jew among Jews, and could achieve this within the paradox of faith

[8] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), p. 4.
[9] W. Schluchter, *op. cit*, p. 152.
[10] Let me cite Weber's entire argument in this regard: "...the Jew set up as his ethical ideal the scholar learned in law and casuistry, the intellectual who continuously immersed himself in the sacred writings and commentaries at the expense of his business, which he very frequently left to the management of his wife. It was this intellectualist trait of authentic late Judaism, with its preoccupation with literary scholarship, that Jesus criticized. His criticism [was motivated] by his type of piety and his type of obedience to the law, both of which were appropriate to the rural artisan or the inhabitant of a small town, and constituted his basic opposition to the virtuosi of legalistic lore who had grown up on the soil of the *polis* of Jerusalem. Members of such urban legalistic circles asked 'What good can come out of Nazareth?' - the kind of question that might have been posed by any dweller of a metropolis in the classical world." M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1965), p. 253. First published in Germany in 1922.

> rather than through an enlightened hostility to religion. This was the passionate feeling of liberation brought by Paul. The Jew could actually free himself from the ancient promises of his God, by placing his faith in the new savior who had believed himself abandoned upon the cross by that very God.
>
> Various consequences flowed from this rendering of the sturdy chains that had bound the Jews firmly to their pariah position. One was the intense hatred of this one man Paul by the Jews of the Diaspora, sufficiently authenticated as fact (...) In every line that Paul wrote we can feel his overpowering joy at having emerged from the hopeless 'slave law' into freedom, through the blood of the Messiah. The overall consequence was the possibility of a Christian world mission.[11]

I have quoted Weber at great length in order to accomplish my own mission, *viz.* to discuss the extent to which current sociologically-oriented analysis of the earliest stages of the process of western rationalization is embedded in Christian theology, more precisely, in the aforementioned "theology of supersession" or "replacement theology," or even "displacement theology".

Let me begin by pointing out that the excerpt quoted above - which, by the way, could well have been written by a patristic apologist - implies correctly that Paul's universalism was formed in contrast to a presumed Jewish particularism and not to any other identity. On the other hand, the excerpt suggests incorrectly that the Hebrew Bible lacked a universalistic scope, [12] that is, that no "world mission" could be undertaken from Hebrew prophetic preaching unless something like Paul's mission had occurred. I will discuss both of these claims, first resorting to the splendid discussion on the nature of Pauline universalism in an article by David Nirenberg titled "The Birth of the Pariah: Jews, Christian Dualism, and Social Science,"[13] then to a brilliant characterization and criticism of replacement theology in an article by Joseph Webb, a Christian homiletician,[14] as well as to the writings of some historians of religion, especially Burton Mack, who have discussed at some length the role played by Paul's mission in the birth and growth of Christianity. Finally, I will rely upon the writings of some Christian theologians who did not hold Paul's teachings in such high esteem as Weber himself did, and upon the writings of some (not

[11] M. Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 259-60.
[12] Indeed, Weber admits to an honorable exception. According to him, the preaching by the anonymous author known as the second Isaiah, to which I shall return, exhibits a universalistic character.
[13] *Social Research*, vol. 70, number 1, pp. 201-36, 2003.
[14] J. Webb, "In the Midst of Another Revolution: from the Old Testament to the First Testament," Papers of the *Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*. Emmanuel College, Knox College, and Toronto School of Theology, Dec. 3-5, 1998., pp. 1-11. Pdf version.

necessarily) Jewish scholars on Judaism who, unlike Weber and his followers, have not viewed Pharisaic Judaism through a Christian lens.

2.

Let us begin by assuming that there really is such a thing as "Paul's universalism",[15] which becomes particularly visible, as it is usually assumed, in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. Indeed, in this epistle, one reads that "God shows personal favoritism to no man" (Gal. 2.6) or, alternatively, to mention a very well known Pauline verse that Weber himself had already paraphrased with great admiration: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3.28) Apart from the rabbi and Jewish theologian Leo Baeck,[16] one can hardly deny that this verse enshrines a true universalism. However, one may wonder whether this universalism brought about something really new. In his article, Nirenberg argues that it did not. Paul's universalism, he said, "would not have shocked [his] Greek-speaking audience, whether Gentile or Jewish, as much as we sometimes think, since it was underwritten by a widespread dualism (often called 'neo-Platonic') that stressed the existence of an idealized brotherhood in the spirit, as well as emphasized the superiority of that spiritual state over the many differences of body and of circumstance that marked the flesh of living beings".[17] On the other hand, Nirenberg argues, "much more surprising was the fact that Paul (or at least his later readers) came to define his universalism against one particular status that had previously been almost ignored by the Greek philosophical tradition. Not gender or condition of liberty but Judaism alone served as the constant target of Paul's eloquence. This is clear even in the structure of Galatians' celebrated chapter 3, verse 28, which concludes in pointed fashion: 'And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seeds, and

[15] There are theologians, such as Leo Baeck, to whom I shall return in the next footnote, who deny that the Pauline epistles have a universalistic character.

[16] In his *Judaism and Christianity* (New York, 1958), the rabbi and theologian Leo Baeck offers a rather different interpretation for this verse, which is worthwhile quoting: "When the Epistle to the Galatians (3:28), and similarly also that to the Romans (10:12), exults, 'here is neither Jew nor Greek, here is neither bond nor free', the full emphasis falls on the word 'here'; and Luther's translation brings this out very well. Between 'here' and 'there' lies a deep cleft, and the unity of mankind is thus destroyed" (p. 271).

[17] D. Nirenberg, cited, p. 210.

heirs according to promise',"[18] which points to the fundamental fact that Paul's universalism was "articulated in the context and the terms of a struggle for control over the Jewish past. Of all the antinomies of identity from which it was constructed, it was only the category of Jew, of descendant of Abraham, not the categories of Greek, slave, female, or male, that needed to be expanded to make room for all humanity."[19]

These remarks point to the fact, overlooked by Weber, that Paul did not negate the male/female and the slave/free distinctions in the same way that he negated the Jew/Greek distinction. In the first two cases, Paul is saying that although whether one is male or female, slave or free, is irrelevant before God religiously and spiritually, every male and female, slave or free, should be maintained physically and socially as he or she is. Not so with the Jew/Gentile distinction. In this case, as the historian of religion John D. Crossan has nicely put it, Paul "takes [the distinction] out of the soul and puts it onto the body, out of the spirit and puts it onto the flesh."[20] In order to make sense of this argument, all that is required is to imagine what it would mean to negate the male/female and the slave/free distinctions in the same way that Paul negated the Jew/Greek one. It would mean assuming something entirely unacceptable to Paul himself, namely, that God would not mind if, for example, a man painted his nails or a slave rebelled against his condition. This notion was not, of course, what Paul had in mind when he stressed that there can be no male, female, slave, or free person before Christ, but it was exactly something of the kind that was present in his negation of the Jew/Greek distinction. At the same time that Paul demanded that every single male, female, slave and free person stuck to his or her own physical and social condition, he expected that the Jews could treat circumcision and dietary restrictions as a matter of indifference. There is therefore a clear incoherence here, which Weber himself incorporated in his line of reasoning when he praised Paul for both negating the Jew/Greek distinction, and breaking "through what was more distinctive and effective in the Jewish law, namely the tabooistic norms and the unique messianic promises."[21]

If Weber was mistaken in supposing that there was something so theologically revolutionary in Paul's epistles to the Galatians, he was nevertheless right in implying that

[18] D. Nirenberg, cited, p. 211. The biblical verses cited throughout this article are all taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, 1990 edition.
[19] D. Nirenberg, *id.ibid.*
[20] J. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, p. xxv.
[21] Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 259-60, cited above.

Paul's position was motivated by the tension between the desire of maintaining the ongoing relevance of God's promise to Abraham (and hence the ongoing relevance of the Hebrew Bible), and that of extending that promise beyond Abraham's descendents in flesh.[22] After all, as Nirenberg reminds us, had Paul been willing to abandon the Torah, or condemn it as false (as the Marcionites and Gnostic Christians, to whom I shall return, would soon do), "Jewish particularism might have become no more important to ancient Christians than any other of the myriad ethnic identities they were capable of ignoring as spiritually insignificant. But since Paul did not, the 'Jewish question' became the key issue in Christian hermeneutics, and in the elaboration of Christian theology, ontology and sociology."[23]

That 'the Jewish question' became the key issue in early Christian hermeneutics is something that one would hardly dispute these days. Weber himself seems to suggest this when he asserts that one of the "unexampled activities" of Paul that had "significant effects for early Christianity" was that he "made the sacred book of the Jews into one of the sacred books of the Christians, and at the beginning the only one."[24] One may wonder, however, whether such an accomplishment should not more properly be seen as the final outcome of a much more complicated and laborious process, that is, as the result of the long, bloody battle for Christian orthodoxy, or, what amounts to the same thing, as an eventually achieved solution for a thorny theological debate that, for very good reasons, dominated the patristic era. I refer here to the debate about whether the god of the Jews and that of the Christians were (or could be) the same one.

It is well known that in the decades that followed the death of Jesus several alternative paths were open to what would later be called Christianity.[25] When Paul started his missionary work at the middle of the first century, a number of potentially viable "Christianities" were already being formed, and the Christianity that he himself strove to establish was, in principle, just one more. Weber was well aware of this, but he did not seem to be entirely alert, however, to something else, viz. that regardless the form

[22] I have taken up Nirenberg's terms here. Nirenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 211.
[23] Nirenberg, *op. cit*, p. 211.
[24] M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 259.
[25] After Jesus' death, "Hasidic sectarians, local mystery cults, itinerant magicians, exegetical mystifiers, cosmic philosophers, and gnostic mystagogues were all calling on the name of Jesus to validate the source or the truth of their programs." B. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?* (Harper Collins, 1995), p. 199.

Christianity would eventually take, the path leading to it would be crossed by a decisive question: namely, what should be done about the God of the Hebrew Bible, the God of vengeance and sword, as He would be called by the patristic theologian Marcion (85-159), whose disturbing thought is now available to us only through the writings of his numerous patristic adversaries. Could the jealous and punitive God of the Jews be reconciled with the postulated God of love, mercy, and compassion of the (then emerging) Christians?

Although the answer which eventually won, after the forth century, had been a "yes", several influential patristic theologians of the early second century did not hesitate to answer "no," chiefly among whom was the aforementioned Marcion, as well as Valentinus (c.105-165), a Christian leader from Alexandria, who shortly afterward made his way to Rome, bringing with him a complex set of Greek gnostic ideas that were being used to construct a Christian theology that could be essentially different from the Jewish.[26] If the Christian doctrines of such theologians as Marcion and Valentinus had eventually prevailed, then there would have been no point in making the Hebrew Bible into a sacred book of the Christians. However, even pointing out that in the Old Testament the idea of "salvation" still had "the elementary rational meaning of liberation from concrete ills,"[27] Weber could not conceive any kind of Christianity apart from it. Thus, in his *Ancient Judaism*, he claimed that if Paul had not transferred the Old Testament to the Christians, "gnostic sects and mysteries of the cult of Kyrios Christos would have existed on the soil of Hellenism, but providing no basis for a Christian church or a Christian ethic of everyday life".[28]

In the next section, I shall focus on this expression "a Christian ethic of everyday life," because it points to a crucial Weberian thesis that has so far been taken at face value: namely, that if a Christian ethic had not replaced the ethic characteristic of early first century Pharisaic Judaism no conceivable rational conduct of life could have arisen at that time. For the moment, however, I must focus on the thesis that no real Christian church could have arisen without the aid of the Hebrew Bible. This thesis turns out to be wrong, because it cannot explain the fact that a doctrine like Marcion's, according to which Christianity would only work if it cut all its ties to Judaism, its scriptures, and to anything

[26] See, in this regard, J. Webb, *op. cit.* See also Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 258-9.
[27] M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 44.
[28] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952), p. 4.

remotely connected to their God of vengeance and the sword, managed to spread the way it did in the second century C.E. As Mach has pointed out, Marcion's doctrine "did find a hearing at Pontus, Ephesus, and Rome. Congregations formed, a school started, *and a Marcionite church spread throughout the empire and toward the east.* Entire villages became Marcionite Christians, and the Marcionites challenged centrist theologians for several hundred years."[29]

As Weber was exceptionally erudite, he certainly knew about the diffusion of the Marcionite movement but, for some reason, he entirely overlooked the fact. Had not he done so, he would not have pictured Paul's mission as just such a highly successful and decisive enterprise and would not have claimed, for example, that Paul's missionary work "erected a stout fence against all intrusions of Greek, especially Gnostic, intellectualism."[30] The strength exhibited by Marcion's and Valentinus' theological doctrines in the early second century is not evidence that such a "stout fence" has ever been erected. It follows, therefore, that if Christianity could eventually appear to itself as the religion that superseded Judaism theologically, it was not, as Weber's socio-theological line of reasoning would lead as to believe, an eventual outcome of the "emancipatory" (as Weber qualified it) missionary work of Paul.[31] It was rather the result of a strenuous, long-lasting patristic effort that had begun as a reaction to Marcion's attempt to sever Christianity from Judaism. After all, since Marcion began preaching, it could no longer be merely assumed "that the god and father of Jesus Christ was the same as the god of Israel, that Christians should be indebted to the ethical norms and sensibilities of the Jewish epic while rejecting the Jewish law, and that the main significance of Jesus' appearance was to expand the notion of Israel to include the gentiles."[32]

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[29] B. Mack, *Who wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), p. 253, my emphasis. The expression "centrist theologians" is Mack's invention. The texts composing the New Testament were collected in the interest of a particular form of Christian congregation that only gradually emerged from the second to the fourth century. Mack calls this type of Christianity centrist, "meaning thereby that it positioned itself against gnostic forms of Christianity on the one hand, and radical forms of Pauline and spiritist communities on the other. It was centrist Christianity that became the religion of empire under Constantine, collected together the texts we now know as the New Testament, and joined them to the Jewish scriptures to form the Christian Bible." Mack, p. 6.

[30] In *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 259.

[31] With regard to this point, the historian of religion John Crossan went so far as to claim that Paul was more important, both theologically and historically, in the sixteenth Christian century than when he was alive. John D. Crossan, *The birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), p. xxi

[32] B. Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

The fact that Christianity eventually became a world-wide religion is therefore something that depended much more on second-century apologists being able to refute Marcion, as well as a number of Gnostic heresies that flourished at the time, than on the presumed success of the Pauline mission of freeing the Jews from their presumed pariah condition by expanding the notion of Israel. One may ask, however, why Marcion's view was so disputed in the second century. Why did several patristic church fathers react so vigorously to him, even after his death? Why, in other words, did they insist on maintaining their ties with the Jewish scriptures despite all the theological inconsistencies that this decision was doomed to involve? There seems to be a straightforward answer: they did so, as has often been argued, in order to make sense of Jesus' sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection. This answer, however, is not a very good one, because it must be recalled that during the second century, and even later, it was still possible to make sense of Jesus' death and resurrection within the Gnostic framework brought to Rome by theologians like Valentinus.[33] Therefore, one would not necessarily need Hebrew prophecy to make good the claim that Jesus died and rose from the dead for some good theological reason.[34] Why then was the tie with Judaism maintained?

3.

By as late as the middle of the second century, no Christian unity had yet been established in the Greco-Roman world. That was a time in which a unanimous voice, or something close to it, was needed, for the Christian churches were widely scattered and the bishops were functioning mainly on their own. The focus therefore shifted to Rome, where over the next hundred years a host of new leaders began to converge for discussion. [35] Marcion and Valentinus were among the first leaders to appear. For some time, they succeeded in proposing a *new* way of thinking about God, human beings, and the world, a time in which "novelty [was] celebrated as a claim to fresh vision, and as a means of

[33] B. Mack explains this in detail in his cited *Who wrote the new testament?*, pp. 254-9.
[34] J. Crossan made it clear in his *The birth of Christianity*, previously cited.
[35] See, in this regard, J. Webb, "In the midst of another revolution: from the old testament to the first testament", cited, p. 3.

distinguishing Christian congregations from other ways of achieving social identity."[36] It was no wonder then that the Marcionite movement had its glorious moment in the early second century. Suddenly, however, everything changed dramatically. It became clear that "the very notion of Christians being a *novel* 'race', children of a brand new god, made known in recent times by means of a messenger from *another* world, flew in the face of every cultural sensibility and philosophical persuasion in the Greco-Roman world."[37]

Besides, the proposal that the jealous God of the Hebrew Bible should be left out was contrary to the "Greek penchant for integrating all their bodies of knowledge into a single system, a universe that hung together and had a place for everything. And the suggestion that Christians were above the law because law was something the jealous god had created; something from which the Christians' god has rescued them, did nothing to help the relations with the Romans."[38] In short, Marcion and Valentine presented Christianity as a novelty, and it became clear that "novelty was not a sign of wisdom in the Greco-Roman world. What people wanted was a wisdom rooted in antiquity and worthy of the illustrious history of their own people and culture."[39] It is worthwhile quoting the aforementioned Christian homiletician J. Webb in this regard:

> for both the Roman and Greek mind, 'new' religion was not something that was valued; in fact, it was looked on with enormous suspicion. Religion needed to be old; it needed to have roots in the past, preferably the ancient past, if it was going to be widely-respected and embraced. In a sense, that became the touchstone for the Christian drive to 'create' a past for itself, a past (...) that stretched all the way back into the very mind of God.[40]

[36] B. Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
[37] *id.ibid*.
[38] B. Mack, *op. cit*., p. 262.
[39] B. Mack, *op. cit*., p. 261.
[40] J. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 3. The concern with presenting Christianity as an old religion remained untouched as late as the fourth century, which becomes clear upon reading Eusebius' seminal *Church History* (available in the web). Thus, book 1, chapter 4:1 tells us "But that no one may suppose that his doctrine is new and strange, as if it were framed by a man of recent origin, differing in no respect from other men, let us now briefly consider this point also." And, in the fourth paragraph of this same chapter, one reads: "But although it is clear that we are new and that this new name of Christians has really but recently been known among all nations, nevertheless our life and our conduct, with our doctrines of religion, have not been lately invented by us, but from the first creation of man, so to speak, have been established by the natural understanding of divinely favored men of old."

How did the Christians succeed in creating such a theological past for themselves so that Christianity could eventually find its way within the Empire? Let me state immediately that this had nothing to do with Paul's missions. Even a century after Paul's extensive preaching throughout Greece, it was still hard for a Greek to make sense of themes such as a martyred god, a bodily resurrection, a new world order, and the generation of a new human race that belonged to another world.[41] All that talk must have sounded foolish compared to the pearls of wisdom from the classical schools of Greek philosophy. There was therefore some hard work to be done: to prove to the Greeks that everything Christians were saying made sense even in the Greeks' own terms. At this point, the theologian Justin Martyr (100-165) enters the scene to "steal" it. Mack relates his accomplishment:

> Look at us and our high moral standards, Justin Martyr said, and look at your own orgies and drunken festivals. Something must be wrong with your own gods and goddesses. Look at them: proud, envious, licentious, and deceitful. Surely your philosophers did not learn about virtue from them. Do you know where your own philosophers got their wisdom? From Moses, that's where. It was reading Moses that they discovered the wisdom (*sophia*) and reason (*logos*) of God that created the world and continue to empower and hold it together. And one of them, Socrates, was even willing to die for the truth. But what Greek was ever willing to die for Socrates? Now think of Jesus. He not only knew the thinking (*logos*) of God as philosophers know it, he knew it as God's son or personal self-expression (*logos*). And he revealed his Father's wisdom and thinking by the way he lived, as the very incarnation of the Father's message (*logos*) to us. And see how many Christians there are who are ready and willing to die for him. Now *that* is wisdom fit for both a philosopher and a theologian.[42]

The Greeks philosophers discovered the wisdom and reason of God by reading Moses! But what about Moses himself? How did he acquire his own wisdom? Was it by speaking to God Himself, as the Jews believed? No, Justin answers, Moses acquired his wisdom by hearing the Son of God, the "first begotten *logos* of God" (Apology 1:63).[43] When one reads Exodus 3:2-10, for example, one might suppose that the voice that Moses hears saying "I am the God of your father" (Ex 3:6), "I have surely seen the oppression of my people" (Ex. 3:7), etc. is that of God Himself., but Justin thinks otherwise. "When God *speaks*, alas!, it is no longer *God* that speaks," Justin might well have said if he could have

[41] B. Mack, *op. cit,* p. 262.
[42] B. Mack, *op. cit*, p. 263.
[43] B. Mack, *op. cit*., p. 270.

read Schiller.[44] As he could not, he resorted to Isaiah 1:3 ("Israel does not know me, my people have not understood me") to make good his claim that the voice that addressed Moses was really the voice of Jesus.

We are therefore faced with a history in which a timeless Jesus talks to Moses whose preaching is the ultimate source of the wisdom of classical Greek philosophy! What a great theological and philosophical achievement![45] Christianity needed a theological past and Justin Martyr created it by turning Moses into a character in the history of Christianity, by turning the Jewish past into the Christian past, that is, by finding a way to read the history of Israel as the story of the Christian God, as a history that could count as the Christian epic and not the epic of Israel that pointed to the establishment of a Jewish theocracy in Jerusalem.[46] At the heart of this entire enterprise was a single word: "logos,"

> the Greek notion that was slipped, almost incidentally, into the gospel of John very early in the second century. The logos of John revealed the "mind of God," that gospel argued; moreover, words similar to logos - God's mind - were scattered throughout the Hebrew scriptures, all the way back to the various creation myths of the Genesis. Jesus was there all the time! - or so the argument emerged. And it caught fire. The Hebrew Scriptures were about Jesus after all. All that was necessary was to find all the references to Jesus - hidden or veiled though they were - and follow them out. The Hebrew prophecies, and there were many of them, where not about what they appeared to be about; they were about the coming of Jesus. God's "word" that was heard all the way back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was, in fact, the voice of Jesus. Marcion, with his rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures, never had a chance. All that was necessary was to revise Jewish history so that it would lead to Jesus rather than to the establishment of a Jewish state based in Jerusalem - which was not to be, of course. This meant rearranging the Hebrew Scriptures so that they would end with Malachi and not Chronicles. It also meant creating a theology that contended that the God and Father of Christ was the same "God" who had tried - unsuccessfully - to lead the Jewish people for centuries.[47]

I suggest that this theology, which was gradually formed from the second to the fourth century beginning with the pioneering efforts of Justin Martyr, turns out to be the

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[44] "When the soul *speaks*, alas!, it is no longer the *soul* that speaks". This is Schiller's verse, as translated by Peter Munz, in his *Critique of Impure Reason*, London:Praeger, 1999, p. 20.
[45] I owe this entire line of reasoning to B. Mack, *op. cit.*, pp 259-73.
[46] B. Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 268.
[47] J. Webb, *id., ibid*. The reader may not know that in the Hebrew Bible the book of Malachi is right in the middle and the Chronicles are the last book, a late one. In the Christian Bible, Malachi is placed as the last book of the Old Testament, since it announces a messenger from God "who will prepare the way before [Him]." Malachi 3:1

intellectual enterprise that, since Weber's seminal writings, lies at the root of the entire sociological discussion about the development of western rationalization. After all, if this enterprise had not been successful, it would not have been possible to attribute to Paul's missionary work, undertaken almost three centuries earlier, the theological and historical importance retrospectively attributed to it, and, consequently, neither Weber nor Parsons nor Schluchter could have portrayed this missionary work in the way they did, *viz*. as a milestone in the evolution of western ethics. Thus, in the absence of the overarching framework provided by this theology, which thanks to strenuous intellectual effort succeeded in making good the claim that the Jews were not able to actualize what their own sacred book brought in embryo, one might wonder how to make sense of the Weberian thesis that Hebrew prophecy produced innovative concepts (such as, for example, ethical monotheism) whose developmental potentialities (such as, for example, the growth of western rationalism) the Jewish people, on account of their "pariah" condition, were not able to actualize. Or how to make sense of the thesis that Pharisaic Judaism had to be replaced by Pauline Christianity so that such developmental potentialities could really be actualized. Or how to make sense of Weber's extremely high regard for Paul and his missions, a regard that becomes particularly visible when one is reminded that Weber pictured the day of Antioch (Galatians, 2:11), when Paul, in contrast to Peter, espoused fellowship with the uncircumcised, as one of the three key moments in western history.[48]

Likewise, one may wonder whether outside the conceptual framework provided by the theology under consideration, which is now pejoratively known as "replacement theology," the Weberian sociology of religion would be able to advance the thesis, referred to above, that Paul "broke through the ascriptive confines of Jewish ethical monotheism,"[49] or to claim that the advent of Christianity meant a "revolution of ultimate values",[50] or to portray

[48] Weber, *General Economic History*, 2003 (1927):322-3. The other two key moments are the Jewish pre-exilic prophecy and the miracle of Pentecost, the fraternization in Christian spirit.
[49] W. Schluchter, *The rise of western rationalism*, p. 152.
[50] Schluchter advanced such a thesis as follows: "Jesus sparked a revolution of conviction, of ultimate values, which led to a religiosity of faith. Neither the subordination of 'sacred law' under 'sacred conviction', the penetration of the contents of the Torah and ethical prophecy by the commandment of love, nor the expectation of the Second Coming, combined with a rudimentary morality of resentment, expresses the fundamental radicalness of this transformation. It is expressed much more in a non-rational inner attitude of 'unlimited trust in God'. Jesus aimed at a form of faith characterized by supra-intellectual conviction. His message produced the unification, simplification and internalization of the religious way of life. It also replaced the virtuoso of law with the virtuoso of faith, thus producing a new form of sacred aristocracy"

the Pauline mission as having purged the Torah of "all those aspects of the ethic conjoined by [it] which ritually characterizes the special position of Jewry as a pariah people,"[51] or else to postulate the existence of a distinctive "Christian ethic of everyday life",[52] modeled after Pauline universalism, which replaced a dual "tabooistic" Pharisaic ethic peculiar to the pariah existence of the Jews and exemplified by Peter's behavior in the episode of Antioch. Could it all have been done outside the theological framework provided by Christian replacement theology? I am afraid that the answer is no, and in order to elaborate on this question I will next discuss the pertinence of Weber's postulated contrast between the Pharisaic and the Christian ethic.

4.

Let me begin by recalling Weber's thesis, stated in *Ancient Judaism*, that thanks to Paul's missionary work a distinctive "Christian ethic of everyday life" could arise in late first century and replace the then prevailing Pharisaic ethic. Weber does not tell us what exactly this newly emerging ethic amounted to, but he is very clear as to what sort was left behind: the traditional "ethic of retribution,"[53] characteristic of "non-privileged classes," which, in the specific case of the Pharisees, presupposed a man who was "weak, as a child, and therefore inconstant in his will and amenable to sins, that is to say, to disobedience against the fatherly creator."[54] In short, what was left behind was a religious ethic that demanded above all "childlike 'obedience' to the world monarch."[55] In an entirely different context, Weber makes reference to a pattern of conduct that is "not a systematization from within, radiating out from a center which the individual himself has achieved."[56] His target was not, in that case, the Pharisees, but his line of reasoning allows us to assume that he

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(Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, Domination*, cited, p. 210) Whoever comes to take this excerpt at face value will conclude that the establishment of a Christian orthodoxy was something very easy to be achieved.

[51] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, cited, p. 4 Curiously enough, as late as 1989, Wolfgang Schluchter quoted the entire paragraph from Weber's *Ancient Judaism* in which the short quotation above is just a small part without adding any critical remark whatsoever. W. Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion...*, cited, , p. 207

[52] See footnote 28 and correspondent text.

[53] "(...) the Jewish religion became notably a religion of retribution. The virtues enjoined by God are practiced for the sake of the hoped for compensation" M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, cited, p. 112.

[54] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, p. 400.

[55] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, p. 400.

[56] Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 190.

would attribute this heteronomous pattern of conduct to them as well, and that he would thank Paul for having offered the 'children of the world,' as Goethe once called human beings, an opportunity (which, according to Weber, was really seized upon only a millennium and a half later by ascetic Protestantism) for behaving autonomously, as adults are supposed to do.

Should we, however, really be so grateful to Paul? This question is not meant to be ironic, since such a distinguished Weberian sociologist as Schluchter would very likely answer yes. In his aforementioned work of 1989, he pictured the advent of the "early Christian movement"[57] as representing an "overturning of traditional values" (by "traditional," he meant "Pharisaic"). Within the "traditional framework," he says, there was 'law' controlling 'spirit'. Now, it is the 'spirit' that controls 'law,' a transition that "led to flexibility in the application of norms, which, in turn, not only produced the intensification and internalization of the religious quest, but also threatened a decline into normlessness."[58]

One might wonder, however, whether such a spectacular "overturning" has ever occurred, or even whether any "overturning" has occurred at all, and, if it has, whether it has amounted to a "re-evaluation of the relation between 'spirit' and 'law' that provided new principles for the character and range of the validity of 'law' without annulling it," as Schluchter claims.[59] Curiously enough, there are some Christian theologians (as well as Jewish, of course) who not only would deny that such a "re-evaluation" ever occurred but also do not seem to hold Paul, the architect of this supposed "re-evaluation" or "overturning," in such high esteem. Let us allow one of them, the protestant theologian Lloyd Gaston, to speak for himself:

> It is Paul's abrogation of the law which most disturbs Jewish interpreters and those who know something of the concept of Torah in Jewish writings. It is not Paul's invective which disturbs them so much as his ignorance. For anyone who understands Rabbinic Judaism, Paul's attacks are not merely unfair, they miss the mark completely. The Rabbis never speak of Torah as the means to salvation, and when they speak of salvation at all, the way of Torah, 'which is your life' (Deut 32:47), *is* that salvation. The ethical earnestness of the Rabbis become all the more impassioned because of their belief that

[57] W. Schluchter, *op. cit*., p. 206. It is not clear whether by "early Christian movement" Schluchter means the Pauline movement or the Jesus movements preceding it. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, it does not really matter.
[58] W. Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination,* cited, p. 206.
[59] W. Schluchter, *op. cit*., p. 206-7.

> the commandments express God's will for Israel's good, but they can never in all fairness be called legalists. Faith and works could never be seen as opposites, for each would be meaningless without the other. The law is not felt to be burdensome (when it is, it is modified), and the characteristic phrase is 'the joy of the commandments'. Far from being an inducement to sin or the curse of condemnation, the law is God's gracious means of helping people to conquer their 'evil impulse'. There is no indication that Paul is aware that many of the laws concern the means of atonement, which presuppose human sin, but which also proclaim the divine forgiveness. It is most significant that the concept of repentance, so central to both rabbinic theology and the teaching of Jesus, never occurs in Paul. As G. F. Moore says: 'How a Jew of Paul's antecedent could ignore, and by implication deny, the great prophetic doctrine of Judaism, namely, that God, out of love, freely forgives the sincerely penitent sinner and restores him to his favour – that seems to be from the Jewish point of view inexplicable.'[60]

Let me focus on the expression "the way of Torah" because it points to something that Weber's line of reasoning would prevent us from considering: the existence, among the Pharisees, of what he himself called "a pattern of conduct that is a systematization *from within*, radiating out from a center which the individual himself has achieved." Faithful to his developmental approach, Weber conceived different "stages" in the development of religious ethics. In the early, less developed stages, religious ethics is "frequently composed of a complex of heterogeneous prescriptions and prohibitions derived from the most diverse motives and occasions. Within this complex, there is little differentiation between important and unimportant requirements; any infraction of the ethic constitutes sin."[61] Weber's assertion, cited above, that "in the Old Testament, the idea of 'salvation,' pregnant with consequences, still has the elementary rational meaning of liberation from concrete ills,"[62] and his insistence on stressing the "tabooistic" character of Pharisaic Judaism allow us to infer that he would count the Pharisaic religious ethic as belonging to such a less developed type.

But religious ethics may evolve, as occurs when after some time a better understanding of what constitutes a sin or what counts as an important ethical requirement ensues. In this case, a radical transformation may take place: the rational wish to ensure personal external pleasures for oneself by performing acts pleasing to God can be replaced by a view of sin

[60] Lloyd Gston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), pp. 18-19.
[61] M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 44.
[62] M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 44.

as the unified power of the anti-divine into whose grasp man may fall. To the extent that this replacement occurs, the good begins to be envisaged as an integral capacity for an *attitude of holiness*, and for *consistent behavior derived from such an attitude*.[63] This is the most rationalized stage that a religious ethic can achieve, especially if, during the transition, there develops a "hope for salvation as an irrational yearning to be able to be good for its own sake, or in order to gain the beneficent awareness of such virtuousness."[64]

The expression "the way of the Torah" refers exactly to that "attitude of holiness" along with the "consistent behavior" derived from it. In other words, it refers exactly to what Weber supposed to be necessarily absent among the Pharisees: a highly rationalized religious ethic, characterized by an "irrational yearning to be good for its own sake." That such a rationalized, sublimated form of piety among the Pharisees is aroused, against Weber's expectancies, can be understood if one of Weber's brief assertions in his *Ancient Judaism* is pushed further, *viz*. that a "messianic hope (...) was throughout borne by the Pharisees."[65] Although this is true, one may still ask what kind of messianic hope was borne by the Pharisees. I contend that once this question is given a proper answer, it will become obvious how mistaken was Weber in supposing that no rationalized ethic could arise among the Pharisees and how far Schluchter missed the mark when he proposed, depending on Weber, that the early Christian movement meant an "overturning of traditional values."[66]

Let us begin by repeating the key question: what kind of messianic hope did the Pharisees bear? Weber would answer that it was the "elementary rational hoping of liberation from concrete ills" characteristic of every "religiosity of retribution," but this answer is not satisfactory. To elaborate on this, I shall resort to the writings of one of the most outstanding scholars on Pharisaic Judaism, the theologian Jacob Neusner.[67]

It is well known that although the history of the Jewish people has been made of a succession of devastating experiences, that history was never interpreted merely as "one

[63] M. Weber, *id. ibid.*
[64] M. Weber, *id. ibid.*
[65] *Ancient Judaism*, p. 390.
[66] W. Schluchter, *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 206. As a matter of fact Schluchter did not present this thesis as his own but as Weber's but, since he did not add any critical remarks, it may be assumed that he took it at face value.
[67] J. Neusner, *Jews and Christians, The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

damn thing after another." History was always believed to have a purpose and to be moving in some direction. To quote Neusner himself:

> The writers of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, of the historical books from Joshua through Kings, and of the prophetic literature agreed that, when Israel did God's will, it enjoyed peace, security, and prosperity; when it did not, it was punished in the hands of mighty kingdoms raised up as instruments of God's wrath. This conception of the meaning of Israel's life produced another question: How long? When would the great events of time come to their climax and conclusion? As *one answer* to that question there arose the hope for the Messiah, the anointed of God, who would redeem the people and set them on the right path forever, thus ending the vicissitudes of history.[68]

This passage might well have been written by Weber himself. After all, what else does it offer than a nice description of what Weber himself called a "religiosity of retribution," characterized by a "child-like obedience" to an almighty heavenly monarch who some day will "anoint" the one that will eventually liberate his people from the "concrete ills" that have ever since plagued it? And, indeed, if it were not for the expression "one answer" (in italics, above), which suggests that there must be at least one more (as there really was, as we will presently see), there would be no difference between Neusner's and Weber's views of Pharisaic religiosity. It happens, however, that the longing for a redeemer, as described in the quotation above is *no longer* a characteristic of Pharisaism after the late first century.[69] Let me quote Neusner once again:

> When we reach the first century C.E., we come to a turning point in the [Pharisaic] messianic hope. No one who knows the Gospels will be surprised to learn of the intense, vivid, prevailing expectation among some groups that the Messiah was coming soon. Their anticipation is hardly astonishing. People who fix their attention on contemporary events of world-shaking dimensions naturally look to a better future. That expectation is one context for the messianic myth. *More surprising is the development among the people of Israel of a second, quite different response to history*. It is the response of those prepared once and for all to transcend historical events and to take their leave of wars and rumors of war, of politics and public life. These persons, after 70 C.E., undertook to construct a new reality beyond

[68] J. Neusner, op. cit., p. 10.

[69] As a matter of fact, Weber was aware of this. In his *The sociology of religion* (cited, p. 228) he mentions that the Jews "expected in the Messiah their own masterful political ruler, an expectation that was sustained at least until the time of the destruction of the Temple by Hadrian". It is a pity that Weber did not ask what kind of expectation was sustained *after* the destruction of the Temple.

> history, one that focused on the meaning of humdrum everyday life. We witness among the sages ultimately represented in the Mishnah neither craven nor exhausted passivity in the face of world-shaking events, but the beginnings of a *new mode of being*. They choose to exercise freedom uncontrolled by history, to reconstruct the meaning and ultimate significance of events, to seek a world within ordinary history, a different and better world. They undertook a quest for eternity in the here and now; they strove to form a society capable of abiding amid change and stress. Indeed, it was a fresh reading of the meaning of the history. The nations of the world suppose that they 'make" history and think that their actions matter. But these sages knew that it is God who makes history, and that it is the reality formed in response to God's will that counts as history (...) This conception of time and change had, in fact, formed the focus of earliest priestly tradition, which was continued latter in the Judaism called rabbinic or talmudic. [70]

The contrast between this passage and Weber's long passage quote in section 1, could not be sharper. Both passages allude to first century Pharisaic Judaism,[71] but, where Weber sees a Judaism worn out by its countless ritual prescriptions and taboos, and in due time replaced by a supposedly more flexible and relieving form of religiosity, represented by Pauline Christianity, Neusner, whose line of reasoning did not develop under the umbrella of Christian replacement theology, sees a Judaism that from its very beginning has a long and promising road ahead of it. The advent of this fresh Judaism, re-born out of the ashes of the Second Temple, may well be seen as representing "an overturning of traditional values," to use Schluchter's terms, but not in the sense that a "re-evaluation of the relation between 'spirit' and 'law'" has ensued, as both Weberian sociology of religion and Pauline Christianity have it, but that a certain way of experiencing and understanding the great events - or, what amounts to the same thing, a *certain kind of messianic hope* - which can be called historical, was replaced by another, which can be called meta-historical. The historical way stresses the intrinsic importance of events and concentrates upon their weight and meaning. It may therefore be considered "traditional" because it can be found whenever and wherever we are faced with a claim to know "the secret of history, the time of salvation, and the way to redemption."[72] The meta-historical, by contrast, which is

[70] J. Neusner, *op. cit*., pp. 10-11. Emphasis added.
[71] As a matter of fact, since the fall of the Second Temple in the year 70, there has been no Judaism other than the Pharisaic.
[72] J. Neusner, op. cit., p. 11.

characteristic of the Pharisees, emphasizes the "construction of an eternal, changeless mode of being in this world, capable of riding out the waves of history."[73]

Insofar as Pharisaic Judaism offers a meta-historical approach to life that expresses an intense inwardness and emphasizes "the ultimate meaning contained within small and humble affairs,"[74] it can no longer be seen merely as a "tabooistic" religion that imposes a "child-like" obedience. If this is kept in mind, it will not be at all surprising to learn from Flavius Josephus that, contrary to what the Weberian "overturning" thesis would lead us to expect, there was by the end of the first century not "a single Greek or barbarian city, not a single people, to which the custom of Sabbath observance has not spread, or in which the fast days, the kindling of lights, and many of our prohibitions of food are not heeded."[75] Likewise, it will not be surprising to learn that "throughout late antiquity, pagans, Jews, and various Christians continued to mix in synagogues; to encounter each other at civic athletic and cultural events; to meet in town council halls and at the baths. Those of the upper economic and cultural strata, further, were bound together also by the intellectual principles of philosophical and rhetorical paideia even as they were divided by the particular texts that they regarded as vessels of revelation. These elites also shared a prime social matrix of high culture: urban institutions of education. This cultural connection perdured well after the conversion of Constantine."[76]

All this is clearly at odds with Schluchter's view of Diaspora Jewry as a "largely ascriptive recruited, special community, closed to the outside by ritual barriers" and "with a low capacity for diffusion,"[77] as well as with Weber's view of the Jews as a self-segregated people who missed an extraordinary opportunity, offered to them by "the dynamic power behind the incomparable missionary labors of Paul," to escape their fate of pariah status, a fate, by the way, that had been sealed about six centuries earlier by Ezra's and Nehemiah's enactment after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile. As a matter of fact, the Weberian view of the Jews as a pariah people, enslaved by their own legalism that put down by Paul's emancipatory mission scarcely does justice to the existing relationships

[73] J. Neusner, p. 12.
[74] J. Neusner, p. 11.
[75] F. Josephus, Ag. Ap 2.282, cited by L. Gaston, cited, p. 25.
[76] Paula Fredriksen and Judith Lieu, "Christian Theology and Judaism", in G. R. Evans (ed.) *The First Christian Theologians: an Introduction to Theology in the Early Church* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 88-89.
[77] W. Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination, op. cit.*, p. 199.

between Jews, pagans, and Christians in the first centuries of the Common Era. With regard to this point, it is worthwhile mentioning that even Schluchter took issue, even though rather timidly, with Weber's pariah concept, by asserting, after Causse's work of 1937,[78] that Weber's "pariah thesis is a projection of a phase of medieval development back into antiquity."[79]

But to take issue with Weber's pariah thesis amounts to entertaining in the Jewish religious framework the possibility of the inclusion of non-Jews. The question then arises: could such an inclusion of non-Jews be accomplished within the religious framework of Judaism? Or, what amounts to the same thing: does this framework have a universal scope?

5.

Among the books of the Hebrew bible that deserved Weber's special attention, there is one that directly addresses the question above. I am referring to Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55). Weber held this book in the highest esteem because, according to him, its author, unlike all the other biblical prophets, was not only concerned with the future of Israel: "his problem," Weber stressed, was "the theodicy of Israel's suffering in the universal perspective of a wise and divine world government."[80] Thus, in Weber's view, Deutero-Isaiah is unique because it brought about a theodicy, which he called the "theodicy of misfortune," in which God was conceived as possessing a world-wide holy plan, and not only one for Israel. Let us therefore now turn to this book.

I have already alluded to the well known fact that in the year 586 B.C.E the kingdom of Judea, which then represented all that was left of the people of Israel in Canaan, underwent

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[78] Antonin Causse's *Du groupe ethnique à la communauté religieusse. Le problème sociologique de la religion d' Israel*, Paris, 1937.

[79] Schluchter, *op. cit*., p. 178. As a matter of fact, the pariah thesis is of doubtful value even with regard to the Middle Ages. As Shmueli has pointed out, "through the Middle Ages, at least down to the Black Death, Jews in Germany were allowed landed property. Imperial charters granted them the right to possess land. In 1236, for example, the Emperor Frederich II renewed this privilege (...) Jews were also owners of homes and homesteads in cities. Up to the fourteenth century they were not excluded from the guilds of merchants and craftsmen (...) In many cities of Germany, the Jews were burghers. They kept Christian servants. They administered their own affairs through autonomous institutions within the framework of the town community. All these facts are certainly not evidence of a pariah situation." E. Shmueli: "The 'pariah-people' and its 'charismatic leadership'," *American Academy for Jewish Research*, Proceedings, vol. 36, 1968, pp 167-247, p. 191.

[80] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, p. 375.

a devastating experience. The temple was reduced to ruins, its rituals brought to an end, the greater part of the nation was captive to Babylon, and the "captains of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen" (2 Kings XXV.12).[81] According to Weber, the anonymous author of Deutero-Isaiah interprets this devastating experience as a means (the most important one, actually) to the realization of God's universal holy plan. In other words, the realization of God's universal plan demanded that Israel be "purified." This being the case, Israel's ignominious fate was only a means to purification: "Yahweh does not purify his faithful 'as one refines silver'," Weber wrote, paraphrasing Isaiah, chapter 48, verse 10, "but he makes them his 'chosen people' in the furnace of affliction'."[82] Whereas earlier Hebrew prophetic preaching evaluated misery merely as a punishment for sins or as an admonition to do penance, in Deutero-Isaiah this usual pattern was "far surpassed by an entirely different and positive soteriological meaning of suffering *per se*. Blameless suffering is valued by the sharpest contrast with pre-exilic prophecy."[83] Insofar as Deutero-Isaiah "glorifies undeserved suffering" as a means to fulfill a soteriological mission, this "extraordinary book,"[84] Weber claimed, entails "the specific ethic of meekness and non-resistance revived in the Sermon of the Mount (...)" which "helped to give birth to Christology."[85]

If it is true that Deutero-Isaiah entails a "specific ethic of meekness and non-resistance," then one may ask what kind: is it the meekness and non-resistance revived in the Sermon of the Mount, as Weber asserted? I am afraid it is not, for the meekness and non-resistance preached in the Sermon of the Mount entail a messianic hope entirely disconnected from national and political concerns. As a result, the earthly kingdom is severed from the kingdom of God, something unacceptable to the all of the prophetic literature, which always "casts its hope upon the Davidic dynasty and the restoration of a successful and righteous kingdom."[86] Therefore, by suggesting that Deutero-Isaiah and Jesus (in his Sermon of the Mount) are saying the same thing, Weber is overlooking the fact that the "meekness" and the "non-resistance" preached by the author of Deutero-Isaiah are

[81] See A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1949), p. xv.
[82] *Ancient Judaism*, p. 371
[83] *Ancient Judaism*, p. 373
[84] *Ancient Judaism*, p. 377.
[85] *Ancient Judaism*, p. 376.
[86] E. Shmueli, *cited*, p. 221.

connected to the elevation of the kingdom and not with its negation. I quote a distinguished scholar on Judaism at some length in order to elaborate on this:

> Weber stressed in many places throughout his studies that the prophetic teaching appealed to the 'plebeian' strata and that the workaday ethic became mainly a 'plebeian' ethic because of its affinity to these strata (...) The justification of suffering appealed particularly to the plebeian strata, to the poor and meek, who believed that they were pious and just. The prophetic morality could not have been accepted by the militant nobleman, wealthy landlords and in the princely courts. It is, however, a mistaken notion, influenced by Nietzsche's construction in his *Genealogy of Morals,* that the prophetic teachings of morality have a plebeian character or are the source of religiosity cultivated by pariah status groups: The lowest strata - Nietzsche and Weber argue - particularly, the dispossessed and the poor, when they do not acknowledge cunning and deceptions as legitimate weapons in their struggle for survival, convert the poor into the pious and celebrate humbleness and subjugation as moral virtues in themselves. Nietzsche rejected this 'morality of slaves' as disguised resentment. Prophetic morality, however, was rather revolutionary and heroic. It protested against social and economic subjugation and all powerlessness which delivered men into the hands of other men. *Suffering because of social oppression was not celebrated.* The Deutero-Isaiah hailed suffering as the service rendered to God's cause for the purpose of accelerating salvation. Filled with the consciousness of representing the cause of God, the prophets were able to fight the mighty. In later periods, where the open fight was impossible, a heroic patience became the characteristic of the Jewish people.[87]

If the ethic of "meekness" and "non-resistance" preached in Deutero-Isaiah was somehow "revived" at a later time, as Weber suggested, it would be more appropriate to say that it was revived as the "heroic patience," mentioned above, than as the "glorification of blameless suffering" expressed in the Sermon of the Mount. After all, "heroic patience" is clearly a feature of the *meta-historical* approach to life, which, as we have seen, emphasizes the construction of an eternal, changeless mode of being in this world, capable of riding out the waves of history, and is characteristic of Judaism since the late first-century,[88] whereas "glorifying blameless suffering" is clearly a feature of the *historical* approach to life, so-called because it stresses the importance of unique messianic events,

[87] Ephraim Shmueli's "The pariah-people and its charismatic leadership. A revaluation of Max Weber's 'Ancient Judaism'," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. XXXVI, New York, 1968, pp. 221-222.

[88] I am using here Neusner's distinction between "historical" and "meta-historical" messianic hope, mentioned above.

which is characteristic of early Christianity. There are, therefore, distinctively Jewish and distinctively Christian ways of being "meek" and "non-resistant," but this was not what Weber saw. What he saw was one and the same mode of being that was first adopted by the Jews, with "fateful" consequences: "the glorification of the situation of the pariah people and its tarrying endurance,"[89] and then "revived" by Jesus in his Sermon of the Mount. Although Weber does not say so, his entire line of reasoning entitles us to assert that, according to him, it is exactly on account of being "revived" that the Deutero-Isaiah project of holding the theodicy of Israel's suffering in the "universal perspective of a wise and divine world government" could be executed in a proper way. Thus, what Weber is implying is exactly what replacement theology would state: that Deutero-Isaiah is historically, theologically, or even ethically relevant because it conceived a universalistic project whose execution depended on the subsequent advent of Christianity.

Apart from Deutero-Isaiah, there is still, in Weber's view, a possibility of entertaining a universalistic scope within the religious framework of Judaism. This can be achieved by purging the Torah from "all those aspects of the ethic conjoined by [it] which ritually characterizes the special position of Jewry as a pariah people."[90] Weber, as we have seen, imagined that Paul's mission succeeded in accomplishing this task, but that is not what the theologians of our own time think, the Christian theologians like Lloyd Gaston, whom I have quoted at length, or Rosemary Ruether, who is widely known for having coined the happy expression "theology of supersession".

In her *Faith and Fratricide*,[91] Ruether points out that while the schism of particularism and universalism was a major problem for the Church, Judaism had long since found a solution. Alongside the fundamental Mishnah postulate, "All Israel has a share in the world to come" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1), stands the corollary of the "righteous among the nations of the world who have a share in the world to come" (Talmud Sanhedrin 13:2 – R. Joshua, end of the first century). Therefore, it is precisely Israel's universalistic perspective that allows non-Jews to relate to God in their own way and that enables Israel to have her own particularity in relating to God through the Sinai covenant. In order to be called righteous, however, one must live in some form of relationship with God, and there can be

[89] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, cited, p. 375.
[90] M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, cited, p. 4
[91] R. Ruether, *op. cit*., 1974.

no relationship with Him apart from Torah (understood as revelation), just as there can be no Torah apart from the commandments.[92]

From this perspective, the universal scope of Judaism would reside in being able to specify what commandments apply to "the righteous among the nations of the world." Could this be done? In fact, it is not so difficult to entertain an affirmative answer. As we have seen, contemporary Christian theologians like Lloyd Gaston, and not so contemporary ones like George Foot Moore, were astonished that Paul ignored the Jewish concept of repentance. Perhaps, however, this omission is not so astonishing if it is recalled that as Paul addressed, fundamentally, not a Jewish, but a culturally Greek audience, the content of his preaching could be based on a part of the Torah that dealt exclusively with non-Jews.[93] I refer here to the so-called seven laws of Noah (or Noahide Laws), which would later be codified in the Talmud. Some scholars claim that these laws formed the core of Paul's teachings, such as they are revealed in his Epistles.[94] The Noahide Law was a very simple set of prohibitions: idolatry, taking the name of God in vain, theft, murder, improper sexual conduct, and cruelty to animals, plus a commandment according to which it was necessary to establish local Courts of Justice that could locally ensure the observation of the six prohibitions. Several Pharisees who lived at the same time as Paul already believed that whoever observed the Noahide Laws should be considered "righteous" and, therefore, would have his "share in the world to come." According to this view, the Torah does not need to become a Christian sacred book in order to enjoy a universal character: insofar as it enshrines the Laws of Noah, it exhibits religiosity without any restriction of ethnic or national ties at the same time that it forbids - by contrast to, for example, Catholic Christianity - whatever institutionalized way there is of conceding grace. The reason, by the way, for such a bare framework (only seven items) of religious law is that "it takes away the concept of religious authority on an institutionalized basis, and puts it into the hands of

[92] See L. Gaston, *op. cit.* , p. 23

[93] This is a rather charitable reading of Paul. A Jewish theologian like Leo Baeck would not be astonished that Paul ignored the Jewish concept of repentance for a very different reason: because, according to him, Paul's theology was that of the "finished man," which asserts that when a man receives Christ there is nothing left to learn or to repent for. See Leo Baeck, *op. cit*, especially the last chapter..

[94] See, in this regard, the entry "Jewish-Christian Sects" in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM Edition.

the individual. Because of this provision, no one, not even a rabbi, could tell an observer of the Noahide Law what to do, or have any religious authority over him whatsoever."[95]

It is clear that this argument involves a thorny discussion about the relations between Judaism and Christianity. Yet, I think that the sociology of religion cannot refrain from undertaking this kind of discussion, however thorny it may be, unless crucial sociological themes are deliberately relinquished. Weber seems to have been fully aware of the inevitability of debate within the terrain of theology, as one can conclude from Friedrich Graf's assertion, after having had access to Weber's personal correspondence, that: "In later years, Weber repeatedly emphasized that for him the most important participants in the debate over *The Protestant Ethic* were the 'experts' in religious matters, the theologians. *From them alone he expected a 'fruitful and instructive critique*'." [96]

Allowing a sociological discussion to enter the terrain of theology implies walking along the edge of a cliff, but either one takes the risk, as Weber himself did, or one is obliged to refrain from addressing such a crucial sociological concern as the rise of western rationalism. If a decisive moment of this process was, as it has been stressed since Weber, the transition from Saul, the Pharisee, to Paul, the Christian, then it is unavoidable to discuss the nature and the real importance of this transition - something that cannot be done apart from theology. Thus, if one questions the Weberian thesis that the Pauline teachings represented a break through the Mosaic Law, in whose confines, Weber claimed, "the idea of 'salvation,' pregnant with consequences, still has the elementary rational meaning of liberation from concrete ills," [97] then one is moving into the terrain of theology, that is, and encountering Christian theology. If, on the other hand, one takes this thesis at face value, as has been done since Weber's seminal writings, then one is once again moving in the terrain of theology, more precisely, within the framework of Christian displacement theology. If it seems to be inevitable that one moves in the terrain of theology whenever the aim is to

[95] This quotation is taken from an anonymous document titled "Christian Talmud," available on the web. Although this document displays unnecessary philo-semitism, as well as some silly talk about a presumed Jewish way of thinking, it nevertheless seems to me to be valuable both as a source of information and food for thought.

[96] Friedrich W. Graf, "The German Theological Sources and Protestant Church Politics", in: H. Lehman and G. Roth (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic, Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 27, my emphasis..

[97] M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 44.

study the socio-historical impact of different religious teachings and practices, then I am afraid that it better be done openly.

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