

## **The Covenants of Hope in the Priestly Writings**

### **A) The Context of the Priestly Writings**

As with the Deuteronomistic synthesis, so too with the Priestly writings, distinctions have to be made in the redaction carried out over a lengthy period of time. The very term 'Priestly' is given to a body of writings with definite emphases and with a precise terminology because of obvious concerns with the cult, the priesthood and with liturgical organization. Sean McEvenue has described the style of this writing with its penchant for repetition, for systematization with numbers and dates, with its concern to de-psychologize, with its avoidance of interior tension and struggle, as being akin to children's literature, which is so fond of repetition, development and organization. In one sense, the Priestly writings offer an approach and a style which is the very antithesis to the Deuteronomists.

The Priestly document also had its nucleus of stories that generated a theology that eventually would be incorporated into the main body of the Pentateuch. The final redactors of the pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic works themselves were most likely the priestly writers who achieved this final authoritative work during the restoration of Jerusalem in the 5th century. The scribe Ezra and the schools of learning that he represented during the period during the return from the exile are the likely candidates for this literary achievement. But the original setting that generated the reworking of the patriarchal stories is generally believed to reside back in the exilic period. The particular theological challenge that the exile presented for the priestly tradition was the loss of the cult as the locus for mediation between the people of the covenant and their God. The written word then was emphasized to continue a mediation between God and the Israelites in the time of the exile. As we will see in the understanding and expression of covenant that this priestly theology generated, the theological response to the exilic crisis is quite different from that of the Deuteronomists. Where Deuteronomy sought to preserve and strengthen Israelite identity with a radical call to conversion and to commitment to the teachings of the LORD, the priestly writers offered a theology of hope, confidence and consolation.

### **B) The Priestly Account of Creation (Genesis 1)**

Even though the Priestly account of creation is not formally presented as a covenant between humanity and God through the use of the technical term, *berit*, several stylistic features of the narrative reveal similarities to general covenant theology. The polarity of the covenantal relationship between gift and task, promise and responsibility finds its echo in the creation story. On the one hand, humanity is given the command to be fruitful and multiply, and on the other hand, humanity receives the gift of vegetation as food. But more importantly, the Priestly account of creation exudes an optimistic vision of creation, both of the universe (cosmology) and of humanity (anthropology), that is

unrivalled in the Ancient world. And this optimistic and positivistic vision worked into the foundations of human origins can be seen to be consistent with the Priestly writers' reworking of covenant theology in the Pentateuch.

- i) Why do the Priestly writers add another story of creation?

The work of the Yahwist opens with a story of creation that concentrates on the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:4--3). It immediately proceeds with the story of the fall (Genesis 3). In this way, these etiological (etios = cause, beginning) stories of human origins are meant to present both the hopes of human beings of unity and the dread of failure and rupture. Even here in the Yahwist version of human origins we can see the essential backdrop of covenant theology. The etiological story of the Yahwist represents Israel's hope of unity with God as well as the awareness of the rupture of the covenant and its effects on human life.

We cannot be sure whether or not the original Yahwist account contained mythological stories of the creation of the universe. If it did not then this would have been interpreted as a lack on the part of the Priestly writers during the Exile. In Babylon, the exiles would have come into contact with the great mythological stories of creation that the Babylonians inherited and reworked from ancient Babylon and even from Sumer. Two such stories that have survived, which have similarities or antitheses to the biblical creation accounts are the *Enuma Elish* (When from on high), and the Gilgamesh Epic (the 11th tablet contains a story of the flood similar to Gen), see ANET, pp. 62-88.

In light of these stories, it becomes possible to perceive the intention of the Priestly writers to re-write Israel's understanding of the creation of the universe. On the one hand, it may be that for them the Yahwist creation account contained too many close elements to ancient mythologies that would cloud the eminence of God's role in creation, (the anthropological personification of God who walks in the cool of the day; human beings being fashioned from clay with God breathing life into them, etc.). The Priestly writers then wanted to draw out the essence of the Yahwist creation account in a story that would explicitly oppose the pessimistic views of the Babylonians. On the other hand, it is also possible that since the Yahwist account did not contain details of the creation of the universe, the Priestly writers wished to complete the vision of creation especially in reaction to the Babylonian myths.

In the *Enuma Elish*, the gods are conceived as warring among themselves. Some of the minor gods who had to serve the higher gods rebel under the leadership of Marduk (the god of Babylon). The chaos god of waters, Tiamat is defeated during the divine struggle along with Kingu the god in charge of her forces. From the flesh of the slain god Tiamat the universe is fashioned and from the blood and flesh of the defeated god Kingu human beings are fashioned to be slaves and servants of the gods. In this perspective, the role of the substance of the universe and of human beings is presented rather negatively, The universe is understood as constantly resting on the verge of collapse into chaos. The Priestly account of creation is inspired from the Yahwist account to counter explicitly this pessimistic view of the cosmos in the ancient world.

ii) Literary structure of the Priestly creation account

HABITAT	HABITANTS
Day 1 <i>creation</i> of the heavens and the earth God said, "Let there be light" light was <b>good</b> Separation of light and darkness; <i>naming</i> Day Night	Day 4 God <i>made</i> the great lights the greater to rule the day the lesser to rule the night it was <b>good</b>
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Day 2 <i>creation</i> of the dome  Separation of waters above dome <i>named</i> Sky from waters below the dome  ~good~ (absence of good)	Day 5 God commands the waters to bring forth fish and birds to fly in the sky God <i>creates</i> fish of every kind in the sea and God <i>creates</i> birds of every kind in the sky  it was <b>good</b> God commands them to be fruitful
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Day 3 <i>creation</i> of dry land  Gathering of waters, <i>naming</i> land Earth it was <b>good</b>  <i>naming</i> waters Seas  the earth brings forth vegetation it was <b>good</b>	Day 6 God commands the earth to bring forth living creatures of every kind God <i>made</i> the wild animals and the cattle it was <b>good</b> God <i>made</i> humans male and female ~good~ (absence of good) God blesses humans with fertility God gives dominion to humanity God gives vegetation as food to humans and animals indeed all was very <b>good</b>
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Day 7 God finishes the work on the seventh day and rests. God blessed the seventh day	

ii) the unique features of the Priestly account of creation:

The two features from the Yahwist account that the Priestly writers tend to emphasize clearly are the positive relationship between Adam and God, and the beauty of the cosmos that is represented in the image of the garden of Eden.

a) the intimacy between humans and God:

For the Yahwist the intimacy between Adam and God is related in the touching story of Adam being fashioned from clay with God breathing breath into him so that he becomes a "living being". Moreover God then creates the garden and places Adam in the garden. Then of course God does not wish Adam to be alone but to have a companion and the story concludes with the fashioning of "woman" from the rib of Adam, thereby affirming the intimacy between man and woman. Adam's declaration is an ecstatic culmination, "*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ...*"

*therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh*" (Gen 2:23-24). Even in the Yahwist presentation of the fall, we see God concerned for Adam and Eve's fear of their own weakness and nakedness, "*And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them*".

The Priestly writer condenses and crystallizes the positive relationship between Adam/Eve and God of the Yahwist account into a clear theological statement. "*Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*" (Gen 1:26,27). The dignity that is hereby conferred on human beings stands in stark contrast to the pessimistic view presented in the *Enuma Elish*. And this dignity is expressed through the declaration of intimacy between human beings and God.

b) the beauty of creation:

If there is one idea that the Priestly writer seems bent on emphasizing in the narrative, it is the affirmation of the "goodness" of creation (seven times). Six times we have the explicit assertion that what God creates is perceived as being "good". In fact, the seventh and last assertion recapitulates the entire creation including the command to be fruitful and multiply and the command for humans to care for the animals, "*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good*". Even the relationship between the animal world and humans is perceived positively. Humans are "to rule over" the animals. A king's rule is to provide justice and righteousness to the subjects. So the nuance of the phrase in our case is that humans are "to care" over the animal world to bring justice and order, thereby participating in the rule and care of God over creation.

The entire narrative of creation replicates the cultic week. God rests on the seventh day. The day of rest allows for the review of the culmination of one's work. It provides space for the contemplation of the results of one's labour.

The Babylonian idea of the defeat of chaos is integrated into the text of the Priestly writer. But here God's defeat of chaos does not occur through a cosmic struggle but through the effortless utterance of the divine will; "Let there be light; let the waters bring forth ...; let the earth bring forth ...". Even the image of chaos is not personified into a god but remains associated with its primal, and archetypal referent, the waters. "*The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep while the spirit of God (a mighty wind) hovered over the face of the waters*" (Gen 1:2).

The four primary metaphors for depicting creation can be identified in the Priestly creation account: 1) creation through the word, a command based on intelligence and aesthetic beauty  
2) creation through engendering, the earth brought forth as did the seas  
3) creation through struggle, the cosmic battle, is deliberately subdued in the image of God Spirit hovering over the primeval waters  
4) creation through art and architecture, God separates and gathers and sets limits, organizes the habitats and places within their inhabitants

It is important to see how the relatively short narrative of creation is meant to complement the subsequent stories of the Yahwist account. For instance, the Priestly account does not particularly emphasize creation of vegetation. The earth produces vegetation which is given as food to both

animals and humans (Gen 1:29-30). Notice how in the Yahwist account of chapter two, we see a preponderance of the creation of vegetation which is focused in the dense image of the "garden" with its rivers, grass, plants, trees. Similarly, the Priestly account which emphasizes the inherent goodness of the elements of creation only serves to intensify and clarify the Yahwist explanation that the fall and subsequent human tragedies have their source in ethical decision. It is not the cosmos that brings evil and tragedy, but the human heart. The complete reading of the Priestly writer in light of the integrated Yahwist strands would assert the inherent goodness of creation, and the human heart as being the source and locus of so much human tragedy.

In the following Priestly adaptations of the Noah and Abrahamic stories, we can notice the Priestly bent to transform older stories into concrete images of hope. The hopeful elements in the Priestly account of creation which highlight the positive forces of creation and the intimate relationship between humans and God will carry over into their understanding of the covenantal relationship between Israel and God.

### **C) The Covenant with Noah, Genesis 6-9**

(6:9-22; 7:6,11,13-16a,17a,18-21,24; 8:1,2a,3b-5,13a,14-19; 9:1-17,28)

The story of the flood and the covenant with Noah after the flood is a blend of the Yahwist account with a priestly account. The stories have been interwoven like many of the Yahwist and Elohist accounts, yet a careful separation of the strands uncovers a separate account with its own style and technical terms. It is doubtful whether the Priestly accounts ever stood alone as a separate narrative. They seem to have been composed to bring a final unity to the various stories of the pentateuch, including those of Deuteronomy.

Yahwist: 6:5-7, This short passage contains a theological introduction regarding the course of evil on earth, with the introduction of Noah as one who has found favour in God's eyes. This is parallel to 8:20-22 where Noah offers a pleasing sacrifice to God who promises never again to curse the ground and to destroy every living creature.

7:1-14 The Lord orders Noah into the ark with animals, seven pairs of clean ones and of birds and a pair of all the rest. Noah obeys. The water rises and destroys life and flesh. Noah sends out birds to find land.

P's divergence from the Yahwist in the Noah account:

The Yahwist had a free-running narrative held together by the dramatic personae of the Lord and Noah in the flood theme. 6:5-7 is a theological introduction; v 8 contains an introduction to Noah. The Lord orders Noah to enter the ark because of the impending flood (7:1-14). Noah obeys. Water destroys all life (7:10,12,16b,17b,22-23; 8:2,3). Noah finds dry land by the sending out the birds (8:6-13). Noah offers sacrifice and the Lord promises never to curse the ground, never to destroy all life and assures the continuity of the seasons (8:20-22).

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The Priestly writer uses the basic narrative structure of the Yahwist but transforms it into a priestly style which is less narrative and more theological. There is a care to repeat and to balance materials in the narrative through parallelism. There are additions moreover that clearly manifest a theological interest. There is an addition of an outside framework which serves as a genealogical notice 6:9-10 — 9:28-29. There are several differences between the Priestly and Yahwist accounts within the narrative itself.

a) In the theological explanation for the flood, the priestly writer concentrates on the term flesh (*basar*) which summarizes human weakness and creatureliness. This term then is taken up in the blessing of Noah and in the covenant with Noah in ch. 9. 6:11-13 contains a theological introduction; 9:1-3,7 contains a theological conclusion.

9:1-7 introduction

9:8-11 promise of an oath

**A** 9:12 introduction "This is the sign"

**B** 9:13-15a *the sign, the bow, clouds, to see and remember, covenant, flesh*

**C** 9:15b the oath

**B** 9:16 *the bow, clouds, to see and remember, covenant, flesh*

**A** 9:17 conclusion "This is the sign"

b) 6:14-16 (P) The priestly writer adds the command to build the ark and to bring food for survival. This command accentuates a particular priestly style of command and fulfilment. The story of sending out the birds is likewise replaced with a command to leave the ark.

c) 8:6-12 (J) The story of the Yahwist in which Noah sends out the two birds, the raven and the dove twice, is replaced by the priestly writers with a simple command for Noah to leave the ark with his household and the animals.

d) Finally the most significant additions to the Noah account by the priestly writer is to add to the sacrifices of Noah which are pleasing to the Lord, the blessing of Noah and the covenant in chapter 9.

The priestly writer in this account takes up the presentation of creation and the blessing of Adam from the first chapters of Genesis. The very same blessing is extended to Noah with the addition that everything that lives is to be Noah's food. The giving of animal flesh as food to humans perhaps represents the changed atmosphere of hostility that has been brought about in creation due to the rupture between humans and God. Moreover this blessing is formalized into a covenant - a ratified promise. The covenant that is to be established is a universal one. Notice the progression from the particular to the universal:

9:8, I establish my covenant with **you**

- 9:9, with your **descendants**  
9:10 and with **every living creature**, birds, cattle, every beast of the earth.  
9:11 never again will **all flesh** be cut off by the waters of the flood.

By far the greater emphasis in the entire account is the assurance of the validity of this covenant. There is to be a sign of assurance that both the earth and the heavens can see so that the covenant will be remembered.

- 9:12 This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and all living creatures for all future generations.  
9:13 I set my bow in the clouds, it will be a sign of the covenant  
9:14 when I see it I will remember.  
9:16 when the bow is in the clouds I will look on it and remember the everlasting covenant.  
9:17 This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

The universality of this covenant is expressed through the phrase "extended to all flesh". The covenant is everlasting. It is made known and ratified through a permanent sign. The assurance of the reality of the covenant in a perpetual sign is a particular concern throughout the priestly writings.

#### **D) The Covenant with Abraham**

The earliest accounts of the covenant with Abraham are belong to the Yahwist, chs. 15 and 18. The first establishes the covenant of promise and the second story is a concrete realization of the hope Abraham has clung to, a son will be born to him and Sarah. Both accounts are highly narrative, and the priestly writer creates a new account in chapter 17 which transforms the narrative into a complex theological unity through a systematic series of discourses. The Priestly writer has used both chapters 15 and 18 in the reformulation of the Abrahamic covenant.

**The influence of Gen 15:** The priestly writers continue the motif of *berit*, but they elaborate it considerably. In Gen 15, *berit* occurs only at the end of the narrative as an explanation of what has taken place and of its meaning. The Lord has bound himself to an oath on behalf of Abraham. In Gen 17, the discourses clearly emphasize the discussion of *berit* itself. From beginning to end we know we are dealing with a covenant sworn to Abraham and his descendants. Each of the five discourses of God is concerned with the oath.

**The influence of Gen 18:** The priestly writers incorporate into the covenant with Abraham the tradition regarding Isaac and Ishmael. The issue here is a clarification of progeny. Though Ishmael too will be blessed and remains under the sign of the covenant, the promise itself continues only with Isaac. From Gen 15 then there is an oath of progeny and land incorporated into 17, but from Gen 18 the issue of clarifying the inheritance of the promise is highlighted. The land motif is not brought up again or emphasized.

The stories of Ishmael reveal a different treatment at the hands of the priestly writers. In Gen 15 Abraham wanted a son from Sarah; in Gen 17 Abraham wanted Ishmael to be blessed. The priestly writer de-dramatizes the account into discourses that calmly and systematically reveal the content and

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qualifications of God's oath. Finally the sign of the covenant is an innovation in the account which is a particular concern of the priestly writer similar to the sign of the covenant in the account of Noah's covenant. In fact the sign of the oath is the dominant theme and subject of the discourses which is parallel to the concern for explaining the content of the oath.



GENESIS 15 (J)

Verses

1 - introductory promise

2-3 - Abraham's reaction  
(complaint) - Abraham  
complains that a slave will inherit.  
How will the LORD keep the  
promise?

4-5 - promise of a direct heir  
and a large progeny

6 - Abraham believes

7-12,17-18 - oath with Abraham  
and with descendants - possession  
of land (covenant).

(16:11-12 - relates the birth of  
Ishmael)

GENESIS 17 (P)

Verses

1 - the LORD appears to  
Abraham, calls him to righteous-  
ness

2 - promise of an oath

3 - Abraham's reaction  
(falls on his face)

4-6 - promise of a large  
progeny, nations and kings,  
/covenant

(1) (righteousness)

7-8 - oath with Abraham and with  
descendants, possession of land /  
covenant.

9-14 - Sign of the covenant is  
declared.

15-16 - God speaks to Abraham  
and promises a son to him.

17 - Abraham laughs and reflects  
to himself that he and Sarah are  
too old.

18 - concern for Ishmael

19-21 - God affirms the promise  
of a son, picks up the laugh motif  
in the name of Isaac, answers the  
concern for Ishmael, affirms the  
promise of a son in a year /  
covenant.

22 - God ceases to speak  
and goes up.

23-27 - fulfilment of God's  
command for circumcision.

GENESIS 18 (J)

verses

1 - the LORD appears to Abraham  
at the Oaks of Mamre.

9-10 - The LORD speaks to  
Abraham and promises Sarah will  
have a son.

11 - Sarah and Abraham are too  
old.

12 - Sarah laughs to herself and  
reflects on her age.

13-15 - the LORD challenges the  
laugh and the doubt, affirms the  
promise of a son in a year.

33 - the LORD ceases to speak  
and goes up.

Genesis 17

- A When Abram was 99 years old,  
B the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him,  
A C "I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."
- B D 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,  
C E 4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you  
D exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and Kings shall come forth from you. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you, and to your descendants after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.
- E F 9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 He that is 8 days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.
- A' E' 15 And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."
- B' D' 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a 100 years old? Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child?" 18 And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live in thy sight."
- C' C' 19 God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20 As for  
D' Ishmael, I have heard you; behold I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of 12 princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."
- B' 22 When he had finished speaking with him, God went up from Abraham.  
A' 23 Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. 24 Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26 That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised, 27 and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner were circumcised with him.

The covenant is everlasting, the sign is emphatic and assuring. These two aspects focus the theological bent of the priestly writers. Sources for the notion of the covenant with Abraham are Exod 6:2-30 and Exod 31. From Exod 6:7, we see the influence of the famous "covenant formula" (*I will take you as my people, and I shall be your God*). However, Sinai as covenant is de-emphasized. Instead of the reciprocal obligation "I am your God, you are my people", the emphasis in the Priestly writer is that the Lord who is their God takes them to himself (Gen 17:7b-8b; Exod 6:7a). In other words, we see the Priestly concern to emphasize the side of gift and promise in the polarity between gift and task, promise and responsibility. In terms of covenant, the priestly writer presents a theology that centres on the character of Abraham, in the light of Davidic themes (the everlasting oath). What is new in this theology is the value of a permanent sign.

### **E) The Priestly Synthesis of Covenant Theology**

In light of the priestly presentation of the covenants with Noah and Abraham, and the presentation of the Sabbath as a covenant sign for Sinai (Exod 31:12-17), we can focus more clearly on the priestly understanding of the covenant. The challenge that the priestly writers are addressing is not unlike that of the Deuteronomists; but the challenge is seen from a uniquely priestly perspective. The mediation of the cult with its temple, its sacrifices, the symbolism of Zion, nationhood, kingship and the land of Canaan are gone. Where then does the priestly tradition search for symbols of confidence and trust that manifest the Lord's presence to Israel as a people? Certainly not in the Sinaitic tradition which the Deuteronomists appeal to. Instead of presenting a theology of commitment that challenges and evokes decision, the priestly writers present a theology of confidence and consolation in their treatment of the covenant. Their work in the exile is meant to boast the morale of the Israelites by presenting a theology in stories and discourses that are more contemplative than exhortative. From the point of view of covenant theology, the priestly writers show themselves to be firmly entrenched in the Davidic tradition. Again we have the Davidic covenant which stresses the pure gratuity of God's election and favour, generating another theological unity of covenant. Whereas one tradition, rooted in the prophets, used the Davidic covenant to generate a forward looking hope in Davidic messianism, the priestly writers re-read into pre-history and into patriarchal times the theology of consolation particular to the promise of the Davidic covenant.

With respect to the figure of Abraham we have in the Hebrew Scriptures a rather interesting phenomenon of cross-referencing. It was the original Abrahamic covenant of the Yahwist that served as a basis for the articulation of the Davidic covenant equally achieved by the Yahwist. These covenants shared the common stress of a gratuitous promise on the part of the Lord. The Davidic covenant was presented as an achievement of the Lord's promise to Abraham and to the people of Sinai in a new cultural context of Canaan.

Now at the hands of the priestly writers, the unique formulation of the Davidic covenant is read back into the Abrahamic covenant. The Davidic formulation stressed the permanence of the promise - a son would reign forever. Precisely this term of permanence is read emphatically back into the Abrahamic covenant. The priestly writers are turning to the figure of Abraham in order to present to the remnant of the exile a sure sign of the Lord's permanent solidarity with Israel. Even when the cult, temple, city and land which mediated the blessings of the Lord to Israel are gone, the Lord's favour on Israel is still maintained through the covenant of promise.

A particular innovation in the development of covenant theology in the priestly writings is the presentation of a permanent sign of the covenant. This focus on a sign readily perceivable and universal (as are the stars, the rainbow and circumcision, the sabbath) expresses a child-like quality in the writings of the priestly tradition. The permanent sign of the covenant is an image that invites Israel to contemplate and to rest assured of the Lord's promise. In both covenants of the priestly tradition, with Noah and with Abraham, care is taken to develop a permanent assurance of the promise through a universal and permanent sign. The rainbow is a universal, permanent sign of the Lord's relationship to all flesh, never again will all flesh be destroyed by a flood. The Yahwistic story of Noah has been transformed by the priestly writers into a covenant story of consolation and assurance.

Similarly and more specifically, in the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision was the permanent sign of participating in the promises given to Abraham. The exiles, who took circumcision for granted, just as they would have taken the rainbow for granted must have taken comfort in the priestly interpretation of circumcision. In light of the loss of the cult, nationhood, kingship, the Abrahamic covenant imprinted in their very flesh became a source of consolation and of rootedness in the Lord. The signs were assurances of promise to the people as a whole. What was important then was to remain in solidarity with the people under the sign of the covenants.

For the exiled Israelites, who understood themselves as living under the curse of the Sinai covenant, the priestly writers offer a source of hope not in future messianism, not in a renewed existential commitment, but in a recalling of the Lord's oath to the patriarchs. The activity that the priestly writers call forth from their readers is to contemplate the eternal oath to Noah and to Abraham. There is a childlike quality in the theology and imagery of the priestly writers. Sean McEvenue elaborates this point even in the repetitious balancing style that the writers employ.

#### E) The Relationship of the Priestly Covenant to the Deuteronomist

a) These are not contradictory positions regarding covenant theology. Yet in time and space only one approach within the spectrum of commitment and promise can be fully elaborated. The Priestly writers are balancing the continual tension between promise and commitment that is at the heart of Israel's covenant with the Lord. If the deuteronomists stress the pole of commitment and responsibility, it is the Priestly writer who stresses the pole of promise and gift.

b) The permanent tension between promise and commitment is a formulation of categories that can be viewed as foundational.

c) With these two syntheses of covenant theology, namely the Deuteronomistic and the Priestly, the creative work of Israel's covenant theology reaches a form of completion and culmination.

d) What happens to covenantal theology after the return from the exile is rather interesting. Instead of a flourishing of the covenant image as "the image" for characterizing the relationship of Israel to God, we witness instead a concentration on the living out of the Torah. The covenant is an image that recedes into the background. What comes to the foreground of theological thinking is the locus of all creation for discovering God's word to humans. This cultural shift that occurs after the return from the exile incorporates values of universality and the insight of the intimacy between the cosmos and divine order. Wisdom literature, which tangibly represents this cultural shift, presumes as its background the contemplation of creation and order. Covenant will reemerge with striking force as an image to mediate the relationship between humanity and God precisely in the reworking of the covenant image in Christianity. It is interesting to see again how the two poles of gift and responsibility are integrated in the covenant image of the eucharist.

## **WISDOM LITERATURE AND THE COVENANT**

### **A) The Rise of Wisdom Literature in Israel**

The presence of wisdom motifs in the early strata of Israel's written works can be testified throughout the Torah and prophetic writings. (Note: "What has straw in common with wheat," Jer 23:28). A proverb is meant to teach a practical insight into dealings between people, in nature and in life in general. Israel shared this practical wisdom with neighbouring cultures. Scribes learned to write, to draw up documents, to interpret, both in the cultic and secular fields. There were schools for this form of education. Tablets of practice material have been found in clay where the scribbled, chiseled marks of a novice followed the example of the master. Often these schools for learning were attached to the courts, where techniques were acquired and learned to support the intricate political dealings between various groups and nations. No clear-cut distinction was drawn between the sacral and the secular.

Wisdom Literature however refers to a body of writing that is characterized by the employment of rational, common sense arguments in the encounter of mystery, order and dread in the world and in the affairs of humans. Though elements of this literature, such as the riddle and the proverb, go as far back as the very beginning of Israel's written recordings, a preeminence of wisdom literature begins late in Israel's history. It is difficult to define the actual ramifications of wisdom literature. The definitions often are either so narrow as to eliminate such works as the Song of Songs or so wide as to engulf practically all of the bible. But general consensus centres on the characteristic of wisdom literature's didactic scope that relies primarily on observance and experience rather than explicit divine revelation.

These works which are primarily didactic, though they may include exhortative and parenetic material, are best exemplified in Job, Proverbs, Qohelet, Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon and specific wisdom Psalms, such as Ps 1, 139. What is striking about the actual content of these works is the relative absence of references to the many covenant expressions in Israel's history. Instead of a focus on the covenant image as the preferred image for articulating the relationship between Israel and God, there is the preponderance of the image of "creation" that becomes the forum for the wisdom writers' theological discussion. Even the concept of the Torah, the teachings of God for Israel, appear more as a special gift of God's wisdom than as laws emerging from the bond of the covenant. These writings represent a cultural shift in Israel. The exclusivistic tendency of covenant theology recedes to the background while the universality of creation theology emerges in the foreground. Instead of identifying the will of God exclusively through the unique acts of God's salvation toward Israel, creation theology looks to the insertion of Israel in God's creation for language to depict and express her relationship to God.

For the most part, these works are late in Israel's history, composed during the Persian and Hellenistic periods between the 5th and 1st centuries BCE. The question arises as to why they are so

late, given that this form of writing was very dominant in the Near East and Israel would have been in contact with these sapiential, literary works of the Ancient world. Certainly one reason could be that Israel would have come to learn the repertoire of Near Eastern wisdom primarily in the exile. However, another reason should not be overlooked and that is the demise of prophetic oracles and teaching as a trustworthy and reliable means of procuring the knowledge of God's will.

The tragedy of the Babylonian captivity which witnessed the destruction of the temple, including the ark of the covenant (cf Jer 3:16, 2 Macc 2:5), caused a fundamental questioning of the traditional sources of authority. The prophet, priest and King were the main personages who could speak with authority for the people of Israel. The prophets, both cultic and other, could speak with authority because of their training and the personal revelation received in ecstasy, vision or prayer. The priests could speak with authority in certain areas of cultic and social life due to the family heritage and the cultic responsibilities. The King could speak with authority by virtue of God's covenant promise to David through Nathan. These sources of authority could coalesce onto a single individual. Ezekiel was both priest and prophet.

The Babylonian captivity shook to its very foundation these sources of authority. The king was gone. The temple was destroyed. Therefore the priest could not practice his service nor execute responsibilities. The burden of responsibility would be transferred to the prophet. Ezekiel and Second Isaiah are the speakers for the period of the exile itself. But precisely here we arrive at the crux of the difficulty. The return from the exile did not witness the flowering in prophetic teaching but rather saw the rise of another form of teaching that was primarily didactic. To be sure prophetic teaching continued in such figures as Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi. But these prophets did not enjoy the same authority as the predecessors prior to the exile. This can be partly explained by the crisis of prophetic authority in the last days of the Kingdom of Judah as witnessed by Jeremiah and partly by the new concern in prophetic teaching after the exile with practical life.

The cultic prophets had been seriously challenged by Jeremiah (Jer 23, Ezek 13), who called them whitewashers and liars, who do not speak with the name of the Lord. This crisis of prophetic oracles where you have one prophet speaking in the name of God, "Thus says the Lord", and others contradicting the supposed will of God, could not be overcome. After the exile, the prophetic style of seeking God's will through ecstatic experience and imparting knowledge of God's will through authoritative declarations never materialized. In both the piety and the theological vision of the people, the authority of the King became projected into the future as the reign of God; the priestly authority continued within cultic life whose importance rose tremendously; prophetic authority was taken up by wisdom teachers and apocalyptic teaching.

Wisdom teachers based their authority not on a personal divine inspiration, but in the accumulation of wisdom through observation. The idea of life completely being embedded in sacral ordinances has gone. But this has by no means affected a diminished faith in Israel's God. In the wisdom writings we see the teachers holding together the awareness of inherent determinism and order in creation, and unswerving faith in God's power.

This unity was achieved by the concerted presentation of all of creation being in the hands of God who formed it with intelligence and order and continues to exercise authority with order and power. Wisdom literature takes up the teaching authority of the prophets, but does not overly concern itself with the aspect of God's judgment which was so important for the major prophets, and for every Israelite who believed that life was governed by sacral ordinances. However, after the exile this

feature of judgment which was so crucial in Israel's self identity was transposed again into cosmic proportions. This form of literature, which is parallel to the forms of wisdom writings and is often considered a part of wisdom literature itself is termed apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature, best exemplified in the biblical book of Daniel, is concerned to present the judgement of God through cosmic proportions and imagery. Both wisdom and apocalyptic writings share a common prophetic source.

Old wisdom identifies the Law, the Torah, with wisdom and the good life. In other words we see a borrowing from the vocabulary and motifs of wisdom in Israel's literature to bolster and support faith in the Lord. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 22:17-19, Amenemope, ANET, p. 421d). The wisdom teachers through their observations conclude that wisdom calls them to have trust in the Lord for his faithfulness and goodness.

In order to call forth this trust by their writings, the teachers use the known teaching methods: the instructional story (the Joseph story in Genesis has characteristics of wisdom motifs), proverbs, the teaching of a father to a son, the doctrine of the two ways. They developed ponderous styles that delved into the mysteries of life and God's will: the personification of wisdom, order in creation, the disputes of justice and suffering, reasoning against apostasy and idol worship. It is interesting to note the hopeful and positive dynamism in Israel's wisdom writings. When Proverbs appears to borrow from the wisdom of Amenemope, trust in God is precisely a dimension that Israel's wisdom teacher add. (G. Von Rad, p. 191-193, Prov 22:17-19)

The variety of genres and styles in wisdom writings:

- 1) instructional stories - Egypt (ANET, p. 412, Vizier Ptah-Hotep)
- 2) proverbs, numbers, acrostic structures (alphabetical progressions of verse).
- 3) teaching of a father to a son (testaments)
- 4) the doctrine of the two ways, the righteous and the wicked
- 5) the personification of wisdom (Wis 7-10, Prov 8, Sirach 24, ANET p. 431, attributes of a Pharaoh)
- 6) the contemplation of creation
- 7) dispute/dialogue
- 8) reasoning against apostasy and idols.

Though wisdom is anthropological in the sense that the locus for knowing God's will and plan is human experience, human wisdom soon reaches the limits of its horizon when unaccompanied by the personified wisdom of God. In other words, "human wisdom" that does not open itself to the mysteries of creation that testify to its limitations becomes "folly".

## **B) The Style of Wisdom Teaching**

The wisdom teachers essentially attempt to convince or praise through argument. This is a far distant approach from the style of the prophets who attempted to convince, praise and judge with a claim of speaking in the name of the Lord, communicating God's will and wrath. Though the wisdom writers were inspired by much of the prophetic teachings, the method of teaching and communicating

had changed. The wisdom writers took over from the prophets the need for absolute trust in the Lord's plan, the realization that trusting the Lord leads to life whereas disobedience leads to folly and death. But the authority from which the wisdom writers speak is not that of a privileged call from God. The source of their authority is the accumulated experience of right living.

The wisdom of the sages begins from below, so to speak, and from the common experience of the world and human reflection. It appeals to common sense and to the intelligence of the ordinary person as well as to the educated. From this perspective "of below," wisdom also takes on the quality of mystery. Since wisdom is intimately linked to God and creation, it remains within the realm of God even as it orders human life.

What makes this wisdom from below religious is the assertion that human beings and all creation have been made with the wisdom of God. Human wisdom and divine wisdom are not contrary poles, but human wisdom is essentially oriented by the wisdom of God. The personified wisdom, that had been at the side of God at the moment of creation, has fashioned the human heart and the human mind precisely to receive the wisdom that comes from God as a gift. In other words human wisdom is completed and fulfilled in welcoming and in receiving the wisdom of God. Accordingly, the human intellect is fundamentally oriented to seeking the wisdom of God precisely because humans have been formed in her image. Only when people are disoriented and truncated from the life of God, do their reasoning and efforts become confused and fail. (*"They are rendered worthless and likely to fail, Wis 9:14.*) Conversely, the one who acts in accordance to the inherent orientation of wisdom, like Solomon,<sup>1</sup> seeks to cooperate with the forces of wisdom in order to be saved and to live a life pleasing to God (Wis 9:18).

Wisdom writings also manifest an auto-critical capacity. Wisdom itself comes under scrutiny especially when the limits of human wisdom are not appreciated. The critical capacity of the prophetic movement was oriented essentially towards Israel's unfaithful relationship with God. The wisdom writers employ self-criticism toward systems of theology which tend to reduce the relationship to a one-sided view. For instance, the Book of Job manifests a critical assault on a theory of retributive justice that reduces all human experience of pain and suffering as punishment for unfaithfulness. It is an attack against a mechanistic interpretation of the Deuteronomistic presentation of the covenant of conversion. The Book of Jonah can be viewed as an assault against a conception of Israel that is overly confident and exclusivistic of her election by God. The Book of Qohelet posits a severe critique against any view that would hope to exhaust or reduce the manifold aspects of the relationship between humanity and God. These works manifest a spiritual maturity that can be defined by its ability to be open to self-criticism from within.

### **C) The Culmination of Prophetic and Sapiential Teaching**

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<sup>1</sup> Note, if the figure of Moses towers over the pentateuch and became the archetype for prophecy, it is the figure of Solomon, preeminent in wisdom, who becomes the archetype of the ideal wise person for wisdom literature, see 1Kings 3.



Within the sphere of cultic life, prophetic teaching culminates in laments and in praise. It appeals to the authority of God who builds and destroys. It recalls the great and mighty deeds of the past in order to enlist the trust and obedience of the people to the will of God. It sees trust in one's own power as the sin against God's goodness which incurs his judgment and wrath in order to turn the people's heart back to God. The backdrop for this theological perspective is the covenant or the immediacy of the Israelite's bond to God. To fulfil the instruction of God in the Torah is to be in continuity with this personal God who has chosen Israel. To break these commandments is the betrayal through unfaithfulness of God who is always faithful.

Wisdom teaching culminates in the contemplation of creation in union with God. It appeals to the intelligent plan of God in creation and in history through which God calls people to share in the creation of the world. It recalls the beauty of creation, the order in the universe, in order to convince with reasonable arguments that the fulfilment of life rests on trusting God and walking in his ways. "*Fools say in their heart, there is no God.*" In abandoning or in opposing the wisdom of God, a person opposes the order in which every human being has been fashioned. The backdrop for this theological perspective is the creation of the universe according to God's wisdom and the fashioning of the human heart according to the image and likeness of God. To cooperate with the wisdom of God leads to happiness and life. To rely on one's own power is folly which leads ultimately to misery and to death. In the perspective of wisdom, the Torah which is the gift of God's wisdom to Israel and the call to participate in creation is removed at least on the surface level from the context of covenant theology and placed in relationship to all of creation. The realities of covenant theology such as, faithfulness, the bond between the Lord and his people, life and death in and without God, are all present in the new perspective of the wisdom writings. But the authoritative source for presenting these realities in wisdom is not the image and bond of the covenant, but rather Israel's insertion in creation and her intimate contact with the wisdom of God.

In the theologies that concentrate on the various covenants, it is the unique and personal acts of the Lord that are recalled and cherished and evoked. Essentially these are theologies "from above," based on unique revelations and interventions of the Lord in human history, certainly within Israel's history. The covenant relationship between Israel and God is seen to highlight the uniqueness, the peculiarity, the specificity of Israel as a people.

In the theologies of the wisdom writers, God works through the ordinary activities of human life. The wisdom of God fashioned the human heart, fashioned the universe at the dawn of creation. Wisdom continues to direct creation. Therefore, the locus for discovering God's will for Israel is in the ordinary and common place events of human living. Wisdom herself toils and labours with human beings to discover this will of God in life. Finally human wisdom, summarized in the famous wisdom saying "*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,*" points to a dominant wisdom principle. Human wisdom, fashioned as it is on the wisdom of God, is open to and in fact is completed and fulfilled by the uniquely revealed wisdom of God. Human wisdom then is a preparatory activity for receiving the unique events of God's intervention in human history. The relationship of Israel to all of creation is seen to highlight the universal dimensions of Israel's faith. God is not only LORD of Israel, but of the entire creation, universe and peoples. Universality and the dignity of the individual will be a few of the hallmarks of sapiential values.

The covenant image in the pre-monarchic and monarchic periods clarified the primordial features of God's relationship with Israel and God's activity in history. God offers life and calls for human participation in this life. These two primordial features of the human-divine dialogue are taken

up in the wisdom writings, but not from a theology of above where the unique interventions of God in history are acclaimed. Rather they are taken up from the perspective of a theology from below. The image of the unique covenants between the Lord and Israel was particularly suitable and pliable for a theology that looked to the unique events in human history and divine interventions for meaning. These unique interventions say something quite extraordinary of God's dealings with humans. Sapiential literature that begins from below is thoroughly anthropocentric, reaching outward to the unique divine word addressed to human beings. Just as the covenant was an appropriate image that highlighted the unique expressions of God's love to Israel in concrete history, so too is creation the appropriate backdrop for the wisdom writers to highlight the universality of God's relationship to Israel and to all peoples.

The two primordial issues at work in covenant theologies, namely promise and commitment, appear in wisdom writings in a different manner. The feature of commitment is elicited by the practical advice wisdom teachers offer. Commitment is evoked in the most sublime way through the presentation of the Torah as the explicit articulation of God's wisdom for human action. The feature of promise culminates in the contemplation of creation. The beauty of creation and the belonging to creation which God's wisdom has fashioned and maintains is a source of hope and dignity.

NOTE: In the New Testament writings, the authors deliberately present Christ as the fulfilment of Israel's covenant and Israel's wisdom. In the new covenant of the eucharist, the gift of God's very life empowers Christians to act as Christ - to love others as Christ has loved. Christ's word of preaching the good news is the Torah that calls all people to love one's enemies. Christ as a human and divine being joins together the theology from above, the unique interventions of God in history, and the theology from below, the openness of human beings to hearing the divine word of transcendence.

Diagram to show the contrast of prophetic works to sapiential works of the bible.

Moses (prophetic archetype)  
Charismatic Prophets: Elijah, Elisha, Eli, Samuel

- 1) Cultic and Court Prophets: associated with the temple or the court: Nathan
- 2) Writing Prophets: distinguished by the fact of having left a written formula of their preaching, teaching and oracles.

<b>KINGS WISDOM</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>PROPHETS</b>	<b>WRITINGS</b>
<b>Jeroboam</b>	<b>787-747</b>	<b>Amos Hosea</b>	
<b>Yotam</b>	<b>740-735</b>	<b>Isaiah Micah</b>	
<b>Akhaz Hezekiah</b>	<b>735-716 716-687</b>		
<b>Manasseh</b>	<b>687-642</b>	<b>Nahum</b>	
<b>Josiah</b>	<b>640-609</b>	<b>Zephania Jeremiah</b>	
<b>Jehoakim</b>	<b>609-598</b>	<b>Habakuk</b>	
<b>Jehoakin Zedekiah</b>	<b>598-597 597-587</b>	<b>Ezekiel</b>	
<b>Darius</b>	<b>522-486</b>	<b>Haggai Zachariah</b>	<b>Proverbs Job</b>
<b>Artaxerxes II</b>	<b>404-359</b>	<b>Malachi</b>	<b>Jonah</b>
<b>Alexander Ptolomies</b>	<b>332 320-200</b>		<b>Qohelet Psalms Chronicles Ezdra Nehemiah</b>
<b>Seleucides</b>	<b>200-142</b>		<b>Song of Songs</b>
<b>Maccabeans</b>	<b>160-134</b>		<b>Esther Tobit Sirach Judith</b>
<b>Hasmoneans</b>	<b>142-63</b>		<b>Daniel</b>
			<b>Wisdom</b>

- 114 - What is New in the New Covenant of Jesus?

## **What is New in the New Covenant of Jesus? A Few Observations**

- 1) **The context of the question:** a) Christian - Jewish dialogue, (John Paul II, "*The first aspect of this dialogue, namely the meeting between the people of God of the old covenant, which has never been revoked by God (cf. Rom 11:29), and the people of God of the new covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our church between the first and second part of its Bible*"), b) How do Christians understand the relationship between the covenant expressions? c) What is the best way for us Christians today to understand the covenant?
  
- 2) **The Plurality of Covenant Theologies in the First Part of the Bible:** There are many theologies of covenant in the Bible. But perhaps it is best to understand them as referring to one covenant relationship, expressed in several moments in history. They all stress a particular aspect of the polarity between gift and task inherent in the relationship between humanity and God.
  - Noah: a universal covenant of promise, Genesis 9:1-17.
  - Abraham: the covenant of promises, Genesis 12; 15; 17; 22.
  - Sinai: the covenant of commitment, Exodus 24.
  - David: a covenant of promise, 2 Samuel 7 (Psalms 89, 132).
  - Prophets:
    - the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-34.
    - the covenant of peace, Isaiah 54:9-10.
    - the lasting covenant, Ezekiel 16:59-63.

These moments of covenant making do not abolish the previous ones. Rather they express a particular perspective of the covenant relationship in new circumstances.

- 3) **The New Testament carries over this plurality of meaning for the word 'covenant'.**
  - Mark 14:24, *the covenant*; Matthew 26:28, *the covenant for the forgiveness of sins*;  
Luke 22:20, *the new covenant sealed in my blood*, 1 Corinthians 11:25. (Based on Jer 31:31).
  - Romans 9:4, *covenants*; Galatians 3:16-18, 4:21-31, *Abraham, Sinai*; Acts 7:8, *covenant of circumcision*; Luke 1:72-75, *promise to Abraham*.
  
- 4) **How does the New Testament understand the relationship between the covenant established in Christ and the previous?**
  - The covenant in Jesus is understood in light of the "*new covenant*" of Jeremiah in fulfilment of "*the promises to Abraham*".
  - 2 Corinthians 3:14, *the old covenant* (Deuteronomy 29:2-6).
  - Hebrews 8, *shadow and reality*.
  - Romans 9—11, *the grafting onto the vine*.

Despite polemics, Paul sees the new covenant in continuity with the covenant expressions of

the Old Testament. The Letter to the Hebrews, based on Greek distinctions, sees the newness more as a break. We have to choose which perspective is best for our own times.

- 5) **What exactly is the "newness" of the covenant in the New Testament?** It is a universal application of the covenant expressions in the Old Testament. This view is triply positive in that it allows us to see, along with Paul, that present day Jews belong to the one covenant; it returns us to the Jewish roots of our covenant relationship to God; it applies the various values of several covenant expressions exclusive to Israel to all of humanity and creation.

This question arose from the reflections of Norbert Lohfink, S.J., published in, *The Covenant Never Revoked*, New York: Paulist, 1991. Its context is the Christian-Jewish dialogue. During an address to representatives for the dialogue in Mainz, Germany, in 1980, John Paul II made a clarifying statement which inspired the title for Lohfink's book. "The first aspect of this dialogue, namely the meeting between the people of God of the old covenant, which has never been revoked by God (cf. Rom 11:29), and the people of God of the new covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our church between the first and second part of its Bible."

Throughout the centuries, Christians have viewed the relationship of the New Covenant in Jesus to the earlier covenant expressions as one of fulfillment. But the language used to characterize the quality of fulfillment was often enough ambiguous. Did the new covenant complement the previous expressions or did it abolish the previous covenant expressions? What then is the best way, today, for Christians to understand the affiliation of the covenant expressions? As John Paul II clarified, this is important not only for the relationship between Christians and Jews, but also for Christian faith which embraces the entire Bible.

To begin, it is interesting to notice how the Old Testament itself views the relationship between the many covenant expressions. Here we must admit the presence of a plurality of covenant theologies. There is the universal covenant with Noah (Gen 9), the covenant of promise to Abraham (Gen 15-17), the covenant of commitment at Sinai (Exod 24), the everlasting covenant with David (2 Sam 7), the new covenant of Jeremiah (Jer 31), the covenant of peace of Isaiah (Isa 54), and the everlasting covenant of Ezekiel (Ezek 16). They all stress a particular aspect of the polarity between gift and task inherent in the relationship between humanity and God. Perhaps it is best to understand them as referring to one covenant relationship, expressed in several moments in history. These moments of covenant expressions do not abolish the previous ones. Rather they express a particular perspective of the covenant relationship in different circumstances.

The New Testament carries over and continues this plurality of expressions of the covenant. Paul speaks of the "covenants" in Rom 9; of the covenant to Abraham and of Sinai in Gal 3-4; Luke speaks of the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision in Acts 7 and of the promise to Abraham in Luke 1. But the image used to characterize the covenant of the eucharist in Jesus (Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25) is borrowed from Jeremiah 31:31, the new covenant. There, Jeremiah is speaking of a covenant where the torah, the expression of the relationship between Israel and God, will be written on the heart.

How does the New Testament view the relationship between the covenant expressions? The term itself, "new covenant", as it is used in Jeremiah, points to the "newness" not in content, but in expression and mode. It will be "written on the heart". Paul appeals to an image of radiance (2 Cor 3:14). Through Jesus the veil of the covenant is removed so that the relationship between humans and God "shines forth". In Romans 9-11, Paul employs the image of the vine and branches. The vine is the one covenant, and humans are "grafted" onto or broken off of the vine. The Letter to the Hebrews (8-10) employs the platonic image which distinguishes "shadow" from "reality". It tends to use this distinction to present the newness of the covenant as a "break". Even in the New Testament there is

divergence on interpreting the relationship. But clearly the weight of imagery is in favour of grasping the relationship as one of continuity.

The newness of the covenant in Jesus is not a feature that disjoins the covenant expression from those of the Old Testament. Rather the newness of the covenant of Jesus is a completion of the covenant expressions through its universality. What is new here is a return to origins in a surprising way. This manner of understanding the relationship between the covenant expressions for us, today, is triply positive. First of all, it allows us to see along with Paul, that present day Jews belong to the one covenant. Secondly, it helps us return to the Jewish roots of our own insertion into the covenant expression of Christ. Thirdly, it applies the various values upheld in the many expressions of the covenantal relationship to the universal audience of all humans and even creation itself.