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## God's Own Covenant as the Foundation of Judaism and Christianity from the Perspective of Joseph Ratzinger

*Božja lastna zaveza kot temelj judovstva in krščanstva z vidika Josepha Ratzingerja*

**Abstract:** Christian identity finds its origin in the unification of the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is based on the Law of submission to God's commandments, while the New Testament is based on the Law of Freedom in Christ. God by faith in Christ, ceased to be only the God of Israel, and became the God of all nations who made a New Covenant with Him by faith in the Son of God Jesus Christ. The word »covenant«, Hebrew word »berith« in Judaism refers to the special relationship that the Lord Yahweh had with the Jewish people from whom He sought complete loyalty and devotion, giving His people the gift of the Law on the way of life. In Christianity, the New Covenant with God is characterized by the gift of grace and love in the Son, not by the power of the letter but by the power of life in the Spirit. The promise that God gave to the father of the nation, Abraham, by making a covenant with him, was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. The article brings Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's view of the relationship between the Church, Israel, and Judeo-Christian dialogue. Special attention is paid to the principle of the covenant that unites the New Covenant with the Old, the living Word with the written Word and the Scripture with tradition.

**Key words:** God's people, Judaism, Old Testament covenants, Christianity, New Covenant

**Povzetek:** Krščanska identiteta najde svoj izvor v poenotenju Stare in Nove zaveze. Stara zaveza temelji na zakonu pokornosti Božjim zapovedim, medtem ko Nova zaveza temelji na zakonu svobode v Kristusu. Bog je z vero v Kristusa prenehal biti samo Bog Izraela in je postal Bog vseh narodov, ki so z njim sklenili Novo zavezo z vero v Sina Božjega Jezusa Kristusa. Beseda »zaveza«, v hebrejščini »berit«, v judovstvu govori o posebnem odnosu, ki ga je imel Gospod Jahve do judovskega ljudstva, od katerega je terjal popolno zvestobo in predanost ter mu dajal dar postave o načinu življenja. V krščanstvu je za novo zavezo z Bogom značilen dar milosti in ljubezni v Sinu, ne z močjo črke, temveč z močjo življenja v Duhu. Obljuba, ki jo je Bog dal očetu naroda, Abrahamu, ko je sklenil zavezo z njim, se je izpolnila v osebi Jezusa Kristusa. Članek prikazuje pogled kardinala Josepha Ratzingerja na odnos med Cerkvijo, Izraelom in judovsko-krščanskim dialogom. Posebna pozornost je namenjena načelu zaveze, ki združuje Novo zavezo s staro, živo besedo s pisno Besedo in Sveto pismo z izročilom.

**Ključne besede:** Božje ljudstvo, judovstvo, starozavezne zaveze, krščanstvo, Nova zaveza

## Introduction

The notion of Covenant is related to the human reality that has marked many relationships throughout history. It is like a contract or arrangement that defines interpersonal relationships. They often appear as a reaction to insecurity or connecting to a community where duties and responsibilities are defined. The covenant seeks mutual loyalty and trust (Hebrew *hesed*). In the Hebrew Bible, the word »covenant« appears 287 times, and 47 times in the Greek part of the Bible. At the same time, 55 times it means agreements between people and 279 times the relationship between God and people (Rebić 2010, 15). He is unconditionally promising but also conditionally responsible (Tomašević 2010, 247). By making an alliance, both parties commit to commitment, and breaking it is considered treason. The covenant is made voluntarily on both sides, even in case of initiating a contract by only one party, as was the case in the contract between Laban and James (Gen 31,43-54). He has a lasting character. A covenant is a contract between all who are bound by common interests and responsibilities composed of the constituents that make up the »covenant form« and which is concluded by a certain ceremonial act (Rogers 1970, 243). It is usually a solemn act accompanied by the occasional word of promise, oath, certified record, and prescribed ritual or rite. In Israel, it was customary to cut the longitudinally sacrificial animal into two parts as a sign of the covenant and then pass in the middle, saying: Let it happen to me alike this animal if I break this pledge (Jer 34,18-19; Gen 15,9-18). In many cases, a joint meal was organised as a sign of the covenant (Gen 26,30), while a handshake has remained a common gesture to this day (Ezek 17,18; 2 Kgs 10,15). As the crown of the covenant, a memorial is erected for the testimony and remembrance of future generations (Gen 31,48).

In the Bible, the theme of the Covenant is interwoven with the fundamental idea of God's salvation of man through the establishment of intimate communion with him. He shows himself to be a God who is personal, full of goodness and love. The covenant is an idea common to the Jewish and Christian religious traditions. In the book of the prophet Daniel (11,28-30), the »Holy Covenant« has the same meaning as the religion of Israel. People form alliances to establish agreements between two equal groups or individuals for the common good. In that way, alliances of peace, friendships, fraternal alliances, marital alliances and the like are created. In biblical



practice there are examples of agreements between two unequal parties where one superior offers protection to the other subordinate party under their own conditions as in the cases recorded in Josh 9,11-15; 1 Sam 11,1; 2 Sam 3,12. Such a relationship between »master« and »servant« is characteristic of the relationship between God and Yahweh and Israel.

The Covenant is a fundamental analogy about the relationship between God and the people of Israel (Rebić 2010, 42). In the Old Testament, it is the basis of Jewish religious practice. In the historical course of the Jewish people, through the Covenant, their relationship with God deepened – from the covenant of the Law with the patriarchs and the Jewish people at Sinai (Exod 24,1-18) to the new Covenant of Freedom in the books of the prophets Jeremiah (31,31-34; 32,37-41) and Ezekiel (34,25-31; 36,16-32; 37,23-28) as a pledge of peace and salvation. In the New Testament, the Covenant is based on God's grace and love giving birth to the Law of Freedom in Christ. By his incarnation, Christ did not abolish the Law, but rather fulfilled it. He enabled a new universal dimension of salvation. He ceased to be the exclusive God of Israel alone, but became the inclusive God of all nations, concluding with the people a New Covenant by faith in the Son of God, characterized by the gift of grace and love, not by the power of the letter but by the power of life in the Spirit. The promise that God gave to the father of the nation, Abraham, by making a covenant with him, was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, thus connecting the Jewish and Christian traditions.

## 1 The theme of the Covenant in Judaism

The Lord Yahweh (*YHVH*) established a special relationship with the Jewish chosen people of God from whom he sought complete loyalty and devotion. The Covenant he has established between himself and the people is a central concept that is fundamental to the entire Scriptures. This Covenant is an expression of God's love that gives His people the gift of the Law so that they can live through the centuries. Word Covenant translates into the Hebrew word *berith*. The etymology of that old word is not fully elucidated (Ratzinger 2005, 49). There are different interpretations of the word *berith*, depending on the translators (Višaticki 2010, 337-342). In ancient Mesopotamia, the Assyrians and Babylonians used



the Akkadian language, which was the basis of the Semitic languages. It is the oldest recorded Semitic language in which the noun *biritu* has meaning chains or shackles. The preposition *birit* means between. Accordingly, the Hebrew word *berith* means to connect or unite two parties into one whole. It includes a relationship based on a contract or arrangement that is crowned by a promise or a word of assurance. It is a legal imitation of natural relationships based on blood affiliation or friendly foundations. (Krinetzki 1999, 5)

The Hittite people used the word *berith* to describe militaristic and political treaties and alliances. To biblical writers, these Hittite treaties served as a literary prototype in describing the relationship between God and the people. (Rebić 1996, 114)

God established *berith* with Adam, with his people, with Patriarch Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, with David. In the first five books of the Bible, we come across four sources that are combined into a whole. Elohist (E), Yahwistic (J) are among the oldest in which the fundamental place is occupied by the Covenant with Abraham and the promise of numerous descendants and the possession of the land of Canaan (Gen 15) which finds its fulfilment in Num 13–14 (Velčić 2010, 32–33). In Priestly Tradition (P), the Covenant with Abraham further emphasizes the establishment of the rite of circumcision as a sign of the Covenant (Gen 17). The priestly tradition (P) brings a post-flood Covenant with Noah (Gen 9) with the promise that there will never be a universal flood on Earth again, and a rainbow is chosen as the sign of the Covenant. He has a Universalist character to this day given that Noah is the ancestor of all people both Jews and Christians. The Deuteronomistic (D) tradition is the youngest, and together with J and E they treat the Covenant with Israel at Sinai as the most important covenant of the OT that marked the Ten Commandments (Exod 20,1-17; Deut 5,1-22).

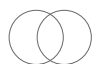
The theme of the covenant in the OT is at the starting point of all his religious thought, distinguishing Judaism from all the surrounding religions that were aimed at the worship of idols and gods of nature (Dufour 1988, 1129). At Sinai, Yahweh established a Covenant with God's chosen people by offering them salvation, which became the foundation of their religious practice. Yahweh is the Lord who fulfils his promises given to Israel, which



they respond to by faith. The alliance is based on a legal contract and an if-then relationship.

This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: »You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.« (Exod 19,3-6)

God in his love chose Israel as his people, separating them from the surrounding Gentile nations. He thus provided them with prosperity, life and peace, which emphasizes God's plan and not the merits of the people. Covenant at Sinai (Odobashić 2010, 167-196) will be confirmed by the blood of the sacrifice offered, while the Ark of the Covenant with the tablets of the Law will be a constant reminder and a sign of God's presence. He will find his place first in the tent of meeting and later in the temple as the meeting place of God and his people. With the later deviation of Israel and distance from God, there will be a need to realize the New Covenant in which God's flock and his bride return to their shepherd and fiancé after an adulterous journey and a just punishment. The New Covenant that will take place in the eschaton at the end of time will result in the establishment of peace between man and creature (Hos 2,20-24). There will be a transformation of human hearts in which God's Law will dwell (Jer 31,33). God repeatedly seeks, because of human unbelief, the possibility of renewing the Covenant and continuity in spite of a certain discontinuity. Here we can see a great qualitative leap in the Covenant between God and people, which is determined by the eternal character (Lujčić 2010, 60-74). This text left a profound influence on the Christian interpretation of the OT and the entire Bible (Willis 2002, 255). This prophecy of promise is one of the most well-known and widespread promises which, due to wrong exclusive emphasis on the New Testament, led to the emergence of rifts between Judaism and Christianity (Brueggemann 1998, 291).



## 2 The theme of the Covenant in Christianity

Christian identity finds its origin in the unification of the Old and New Testaments. Christianity finds its foothold in the written word of God written in the Bible. It is a unique collection of booklets contained in two parts called the Old and New Testaments or the Covenant. The Old Testament is based on the Law of Submissiveness to God's Commandments, while the New Testament is based on the Law of Freedom in Christ. In the relationship between the Creator and the creature, the Covenant has become an example of God's friendship, sacrifice, and love. God gave himself to humankind to reconcile them with himself. By coming to the World, the Son of God did not abolish the Law, but fulfilled it. God by faith in Christ, ceased to be only the God of Israel and became the God of all the nations who made a New Covenant with him by faith in the Son of God Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is based on a law imprinted in stone slabs, which is a moral landmark for the individual. It acts from the outside in. In the New Testament, the keeping of the law results from the action of the Spirit of God. It acts from the inside out.

The Seventy in the Septuagint (LXX) used the Greek word *διαθήκη* instead of *συνθήκη* to translate the Old Testament word *berith*. It is not a contract between equal parties, but a fundamentally one-way regulation – God's command to man (Hindley 1962, 96).

The Vulgate uses two Latin words: *testamentum* (testament – will) and *foedus* (league) in the sense of a will. Later translators used different names like proviso, alliance, union. It is not possible to convey the entire content of a Hebrew word in one word. It is so deep that it includes several different words forming one whole, such as the words contract, agreement, settlement, vow, will, covenant, partnership. Jerko Fućak translated the word *berith* as alliance that best suits (Fućak 1967, 375–379) for the translation of the Zagreb Bible. Alliance reflects a diagonal and personal character. In Hellenism, the word *διαθήκη* meant the right to dispose of one's property, i.e. a will or the intention to impose settings that would regulate the future relationship. The word *διαθήκη* appears in the New Testament accounts of the Last Supper in the Gospels (Matt 26,28; Mark 14,24; Luke 22,20) and Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11,25). By His death, Christ becomes a sacrifice of the Covenant as an immaculate Passover sacrifice



that shed His blood for the purpose of reconciling man and God. Through participating in Christ's sacrifice via celebrating the Eucharist, the faithful become partakers of the New Covenant and of Christ's grace.

As is the case in Judaism, so in Christianity the Covenant is the central theme of the Christian life. In doing so, the Covenant is not realized through the Law but through Christ. The apostle Paul argues with the Jews in Galatians (Gal 3) that salvation is accomplished by faith in Christ rather than by keeping the Law. He emphasizes that the Old Covenant was already built into one economy of grace, an economy whose promises God independently established.

In the New Testament, the Covenant in Christ's blood fulfils all previous covenants in which he rests on the power of the Spirit and not the power of the letter. »He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.« (2 Cor 3,6) Ernst Käsemann believes that the whole of Paul's theology cannot be understood until the words of 2 Cor 3,6 are understood (Käsemann 1972, 115). The New Covenant in the Blood of Christ marks a turning point in the history of salvation. A theme is carefully woven into the theological reflection of the New Testament. Through a voluntary atoning and penitential sacrifice, Jesus forever established an allied relationship between God and man. (Figure 2010, 231–242) In the context of the OT and the NT, the Gospels point out that Christ's mission was the fulfillment of the covenant (Sakenfeld 2006, 767–778). This new covenant results in the realization of true freedom of the children of God gathered from various parts of the World. Christians after baptism »step into the newness of life.« Paul tells the Church in Rome: »But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.« (Rom 7,6) Through Christ, the connection between the earthly and the heavenly and the union of people and God is realized. The New Covenant provided access to God since the sin that was an obstacle to dialogue was blotted out by Christ's sacrifice. This Covenant makes it possible to become a partaker of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is already present but not completely. The privilege of belonging to the Covenant extends to the entire human community of believers of all nations and races (Rev 5,9). Although Christ's Church is already becoming a partaker



of the Kingdom of Heaven, from an eschatological perspective, it will be fully realized when Christ as groom comes for His Church and realizes the »New Jerusalem« (Rev 21,12-24; Isa 62) in which He will unite the Jewish and Christian worlds.

### **3 The theme of the Alliance from the prism of Joseph Ratzinger**

From the beginning of his pontificate, Joseph Ratzinger or Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI sought to build quality Christian-Jewish relations. In his book *Salz der Erde*, published in 1996, in the third chapter, entitled *On the Threshold of a New Age*, he reflects on Judeo-Christian relations. He concludes that attitudes toward Judaism undoubtedly need to change (Ratzinger 2011, 245). It is thanks to the Old Testament that Christianity is deeply related to Judaism. He believes that it is necessary to revive the affiliation of the story of Abraham, which is both a point of diversity and communion, bearing in mind that Jews read the Old Testament not in relation to Christ, but rather in relation to something unknown that comes even though Christianity and Judaism move in the same direction. Ratzinger notes that Jesus was a Jew, not how, not so long ago for the sake of the Aryans, it was interpreted that he was not a Jew but only a Galilean. Jesus knew the Law from an early age and was faithful to it, but he also crossed the boundaries of Judaism, and in a new way he interpreted the heritage and deepened fidelity, which became a point of contention.

It is clear that the Jews were the first bearers of God's promise, and the fundamental phase of biblical history took place in them. Jews are at the centre of world history where all the great decisions of world history are associated with them (Ratzinger 2011, 251). To resolve the Jewish question, a Holocaust arose that believers could not commit no matter what denomination they belonged to. The Holocaust is a great and dark chapter that was not done by Christians, nor was it done in the name of Christ. Although the Holocaust was conceived to have the purpose of destroying the Jews, it was in fact a precursor to the destruction of Christianity. It took a lot of effort and years to establish relationships and heal the wounds that the Holocaust brought upon Christian-Jewish relations.





A major advance in terms of building Judeo-Christian relations was the removal of Jewish guilt over two thousand years old for the death of Christ, which was often the occasion for the birth of anti-Semitism. Ratzinger served over two decades as Prefect for the *Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith*, and served to prepare the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which determined his further course of thought development. In a book called *Evangelium Katechese, Catechismus. Streiflichter auf den Catechismus der Katolischen Kirche*, Ratzinger notes that the history of the relationship between Israel and Christianity is soaked in blood and tears. He believes that the Jews are not collectively to blame for Jesus' death. In his position, he refers to the Second Vatican Council and a document that marked a turning point in the Church's approach to Judaism called *Nostra aetate*. True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; (13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures (NA 4). The violent death of Christ did not occur by a combination of unfortunate circumstances but by God's unchangeable plan. »The Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone.« (CCC, 598)

Following this, in the second part of the book published in 2010 entitled *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger dispelled the myth of the responsibility of the Jewish people for Christ's death, noting that it was the work of the temple aristocracy, not the entire nation. All sinners have committed the death of Christ. However, the blood of Christ does not encourage revenge but reconciliation. Ratzinger states that Jesus' mission is manifested in the connection between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus' mission is to unite Jews and Gentiles into one people of God in which the universalist promises of Scripture are fulfilled, which speak of the need of all nations to worship the God of Israel (Ratzinger 2005, 23). Accordingly, the Catechism speaks on this topic at the very beginning of Jesus' life, where the sages present themselves as a guide for all nations. This will also be a later feature of the Church.



In the magi, representatives of the neighbouring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The magi's coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations. Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Saviour of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament. The Epiphany shows that »the full number of the nations« now takes its »place in the family of the patriarchs,« and acquires *Israelitica dignitas* (is made »worthy of the heritage of Israel«). (CCC, 528)

Christians and Jews have a common task for the world. Ratzinger believes that they should accept each other in deep inner reconciliation, not renouncing their faith, but from the depths of the faith itself. In mutual reconciliation, they should become a force of peace for the world and by their own testimony testify for one God, whose worship is expressed by keeping the commandments of love for God and neighbour. (Ratzinger 2005, 44–45)

In the second chapter of the book *Salt of the Earth*, he talks about the topic of the New Alliance. Originally, the text was written for a series of lectures at the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* in Paris on the topic *Treaty, pact, alliance*,<sup>1</sup> primary New Testament texts that provide focus and teachings regarding the New Covenant, namely the institution of the Eucharist. (Jenson and Korn 2012, 70) The Old and the New Testaments are the basic parts of the Bible on which the Christian faith rests, resting on God's Covenant resting on two pillars. The Hebrew word *berith*, in the

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1 Ratzinger, Joseph. 1995. Der Neue Bund. Zur Theologie des Bundes im Neuen Testament. *Communio* 24: 193–208. Original: Ratzinger, Joseph. 1998, 42005. *La Théologie de l'Alliance dans le Nouveau Testament / Vortrag auf der Sitzung der Académie des sciences morales et politiques, in Paris 23. Januar 1995, als Gegenstück zur Darstellung des Bundesbegriffs im AT durch A. Chouraqui*. Neuaufgabe: *Die Vielfalt der Religionen und der Eine Bund*, 47–79. Hagen: Verlag Urfeld. The latest, official edition in: Ratzinger, Joseph. 2010. *Kirche – Zeichen unter den Völkern*. Gesammelte Schriften 8/2, 1017–1140. Freiburg: Herder. American edition: Ratzinger, Joseph. 1999. *Many Religions – One Covenant. Israel, the Church, and the Word*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. Croatian edition: Ratzinger, Joseph. 2007. *Crkva, Izrael i suvjetne religije*. Split: Verbum.



Greek translation, is translated in 267 out of 287 places with *διαθήκη* (lat. *Testamentum*) and not *συνθήκη* or *σπονδή*, which in Greek would mean pact or covenant. In the substantive biblical sense, Ratzinger concludes that it is not a *syn-theke* (mutual agreement) but a *dia-theke* in which not two wills are connected but one will determines order. It is not a relationship of two symmetrical partners, but God, by his free choice, realizes a Covenant with man as a creative act of God's love. (2005, 50)

According to his understanding, the Old Testament type of covenant in the formal sense strictly corresponds to the type of vassal contract and its asymmetric structure. Nevertheless, this relationship is not based on the image of a state treaty but on the love between God and his chosen people. Speaking of the comparison of the »Old« and »New« Covenants, he refers to the apostle Paul's interpretation of Christ's Covenant in relation to the covenant of Moses in 2 Cor 3,4-18 and Gal 4,21-31. The covenant of Moses is transient while Christ's is lasting. The covenant of Moses is based on stone tablets on which the law is written and as such is subject to transience. The new law spoken of by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel speaks of a law that will be inscribed in the heart. The Old Testament knows three signs of the covenant: the Sabbath, circumcision, and the rainbow. The covenant with Moses is perfected in the covenant with Abraham, and the entire history of Israel can be viewed in the context of the history of the covenant breach. Ratzinger concludes that the Old and the New Testaments can in no way be strictly separated as two different religions. There is only one will of God with men and one historical action of God which is realised in different, and partly in contradictory interventions which ultimately belong to one another.

In the Christian conception of the covenant, the Last Supper occupies a central place. It represents a New Testament counterpoint to the history of the Covenant in Sinai (Exod 24) and thus establishes the Christian belief in a New Covenant made in Christ and his blood (Ratzinger 2005, 59). Sacramental blood communion becomes a reality where eternity and corporeality meet. The divine and the human touch in the Eucharist, creating a new kinship with God. It is understood as the conclusion of an alliance, as an extension of the Sinai alliance, which was not removed but renewed. The renewal of the covenant, which has been an essential element of the Israeli liturgy from the earliest times, reaches its highest possible form



here (Ratzinger 2005, 64). The Last Supper is traditionally associated with the Jewish Passover but also with the Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur. According to Ratzinger, the Old Testament believer does not view the Law as a burden but a concrete form of God's grace in knowing his will. The New Testament believer follows the Messiah's Torah which is Jesus himself and in which the stone tablets from Sinai are inscribed in the living flesh in the form of a double commandment of love. To uphold the Torah, which is irrevocably fulfilled in Jesus himself, means to imitate and imitate him. (Ratzinger 2005, 71–72) Since man was created for a relationship, his covenant with God is not some external determinant of his being but a manifestation of himself as *Imago Dei* or, as Ratzinger puts it, *das Leuchten seines Angesichts* (Ratzinger 2005, 79), the glow of his face.

## Conclusion

The theme of the Covenant encompasses all Old Testament and New Testament teachings with the goal of defining the relationship between God and man. This topic becomes relevant with the fall of the first man Adam into sin and the loss of communication with God. The alliance speaks of love, friendship and togetherness. Thus, it becomes a common theme among Jews and Christians in interreligious dialogue. In a beautiful picture, the Apostle Paul connects Jews and Christians with a common history in Gal 4,21-31. He tells the story of two of Abraham's sons (Gen 16,21) who, with perfect parallelism, show the relationship between two mothers who give birth in different ways (Mrakovčić 2010, 286–292). Hagar was a maid and a slave while Sarah was a free woman. The first gave birth according to the flesh while the second according to the promise. The first son of Abraham, Ishmael, was born in the flesh in a completely natural way, while the birth of the second son, Isaac, required God's intervention in Sarah's life. By depicting these two women, the apostle Paul presents an allegory of the two covenants: the Sinai Covenant as the Law that allegorically represents Hagar and that gives birth to slavery, and the second new Covenant of Freedom in the heavenly Jerusalem, which allegorically represents Sarah. Moreover, it follows that Ishmael was »born after the flesh«, while Isaac was »born after the Spirit«.



The Old and the New Testament revelations can be united through the role of the Law until the appearance of the Descendant in whom Abraham's promise fulfilled (Gal 3,19). In the context of the New Testament, Christians are heirs who by faith in Christ receive the Holy Spirit that empowers them to become sons of God by promise and not by the Law in eschatological anticipation of the »new Jerusalem«, spreading peace among all nations. Upon meeting Jesus, the God of Israel became the God of all the nations of the world. In him, time and eternity become one, and the chasm between God and man is bridged. Although the Church has met the Messiah, it is still waiting for him to appear in his glory. For Christians, Christ is the present Sinai, the Living Word of the Torah, and the guarantee of hope in God who, through sovereign action throughout history, clearly leads his people of God towards the goal of communion with him.



## Abbreviations

CCC *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*  
 NA *Nostrae aetate*

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