The Jewish and the Christian Trinity

When we look back at Jews and Christians, at the church and Israel, nothing stands between them as firmly and stubbornly as the doctrine of the trinity. The Christians have a dogma which the Jew likes to ridicule, the dogma of the triune God. Don't laugh, but don't revile the Jew either as merely calumniated, but try to comprehend that the Jewish doctrine of the trinity and the Christian doctrine of the trinity exclude each other. The Jews believe in a trinity as well, and must do so as long as they are capable of being Jews. I believe the difficulty which the triune appellation of God provides for the Jew will be resolved and attenuated as soon as he looks about himself, and admits that, he too, in his heart recognizes a parallel image, a doctrine of the triple birth of the truth.

For Christians the trinity provides security against idolatry of man, against Hitlerism, against Neroism, against the cult of imperialism, against dictatorships. Why? In the dogma of the trinity the second Adam is called like unto God. This defeats the similarity to God of worldly emperors. When Constantine, the Roman emperor, the victor of the battle of the Milvian Bridge, recognized over himself the sign by which he would conquer, it was no longer the emperor's own name, his personal divinity, he recognized that he was winning this victory in likeness unto God. Thus from the time of Constantine for the entire ensuing century the Christian church wrestled with the trinity. It was an imposing battle.
Repeatedly St. Athanasius of Alexandria went into exile for the sake of the one word homo-ousious i.e. of the same nature, equal, with which the second article of the Nicene creed has equated "the son to the father". As far as I could ascertain it has never been stated in the history of the dogma that only in this way a reconciliation between the emperors and the church could occur without corrupting Christianity.

Humbly and proudly the church held that Christ had to appear clearly and distinctly, not merely similar but equal to the creator - he had to appear as the creator of the entire human spirit. Only then could the church dare to recognize the world-emperors as Christians in its rank. For the emperors had been gods, Alexander the Great, the great kings of Persia, and of course the pharaohs of Egypt were all deified. They were the gods bringing heaven onto earth, imparting heavenly wisdom and heavenly gifts to all and sundry. Constantine had to administer the heritage both of Cleopatra and of Alexander the Great. All his predecessors had been deified. How could the one God-man who had suffered on the cross be elevated above these many god-emperors? Merely by - in the triple, or triune creed of God - outbidding the resemblance to God of these emperors. Thus to a Christian no sovereign, no ruler, or dictator who strives to live a godly life on earth may ever deem himself more eminent than he who was crucified.

The peoples in their fear and in their wish to do homage cast themselves into the dust before the filth of earthly beings before his "illustrious majesty", Thus the ministers of the German emperor
Wilhelm II were wont to do when they wrote to the emperor, signing themselves literally as "perishing with awf" - the flowery phrase quite superfluously introduced into Prussian Germany in the 1890's. This "perishing with awf" before a terrestrial despot always recurs whether he be called Stalin or Wilhelm II. Therefore it became necessary for the People of God, the New Israel which took its place among the peoples and which was sent "among all peoples", as stated in the Gospel according to Luke and Matthew - to slide home a bolt against the temptation to declare any given ruler similar to God or more similar to him than the suffering in all of man. Thus for the Christian the entire freedom of the church and his entire humanity is contained in the equation of God and man. If God has not become man in the Cross, the failure has not the superseded all vested interests; we are all marching through fog, at the mercy of every tyrant, of every freak of fashion, of every radio address, of every idiocy, of every malady of the intellect. The fear of decline would cease, slavery is.

The doctrine of the trinity is still more comprehensive, however. It also contains the third article of faith, in the Holy Spirit the "fertility of the son of man". Here the fertility of man who reveals God in his suffering not in his might, and from his followers creates a people, is described. In his frailty he better represents the power of God, the creator, than do all the sovereigns and all the Cadillac and Mercedes owners with their infinite horse power totals taken together. God becoming man has born a new people, the church. The fertility of the son revealed in the Holy Ghost, and whole peoples
are regarded as an individual being if they allow themselves to be
seized by the Holy Ghost and if they thus become its people - via the
Son the people of the Father. The Old Israel is Abraham's seed. The
church, however, is a people mystically born by the spirit; every
Christian is as Abraham was or there isn't any church.

After this grand experience, from God the Father to God the Son to the
Holy Ghost, has been traversed, later you find on black and white, for
children in confirmation class to learn, a list of three. Naturally,
the temptation of the orthodox Jew then arises to say; those are real-
ly three gods. The church itself has always frequently fought this
"doctrine of the three Gods". Despite this the Jew continues
to reproach the Christian of this being a superstition: God is one.
This, any orthodox Jew will repeat and stress.
The unity of God, however, by us humans; beings living in time, can
only be grasped in terms of time. I must breathe to live - but brea-
ting takes time, sixteen respirations per minute is normal. It seems
to me that in the Holy Trinity God's breath is reflected. The creation
of man, life and suffering of the Son and the working of the Holy
Ghost are each one single breath of God. We can only experience, com-
prehend and grasp one after the other what really happens all at once.
We analyze. We divide into this present instant, into the next instant,
and into the third successive instant the single act of God in which
he creates a new people, i.e. in but three seconds. Woe be unto us if
we do not associate these seconds. But woe to us also if we imagine
that with the mere name of God - with a simple word "God", I should
rather say - we can describe or experience his creative power, his vitality, his directness, his inevitability, his working and fertility.

For me, therefore, from my youth onward, the trinity has been the most obvious way of grasping the divine working as a form of breathing. "inhale", "hold your breath", "exhale" it could be paraphrased. In anything that happens there is a beginning, a middle and an end. Thus the trinity attempts to describe God's engaging in a fullness of life incomprehensible to our poor human power of reasoning only. God is no geometric concept, for he is the one who makes us speak. God intervenes, and speaking takes time. The master thinkers, the Greeks, and those who have learnt to think from the Greeks and like the Greeks, our academicians, deny that speaking takes time. Thus they cannot grasp the humility of the trinitarian doctrine. In two volumes, the "Sprache des Menschenrassschlechts" (Speech of the Human Race) 1963-65) I have championed the temporal character of the names of our gods. However, the Old Israel established a second from the Jews say: One God alone, your trinity is defection, is paganism. But also the Jews come among the pagan peoples. In the midst of history Abraham appears, looks about, sees the many peoples, and the confusion of peoples, and comes to believe that out of all these peoples one single one will arise. He believes that he himself will have to at least plant the seed thereof. He comes in the midst of time, God has already created the peoples and permitted them to proceed into a state of con-
rather say - we cannot describe or experience his creative power, his vitality, his directness, his inevitability, his working and fecundity, his process from eternity to eternity. (For me, therefore, from my youth onward, the trinity has been the most obvious way of grasping the divine working as a form of breathing. In anything that happens there is a beginning, a middle and an end. Thus the trinity attempts to describe God's engaging in a fullness of life comprehensible to our poor human power of reasoning only. God is no geometric concept, for he is the one who makes us speak. God intervenes, and speaking takes time. The master thinkers, the Greeks, and those who have learned to think from the Greeks and like the Greeks, that our academicians, deny speaking takes time. Thus they cannot grasp the humility of the trinitarian doctrine. In two volumes, the "Sprache des Menschengeschlechts" (Speech of the Human Race 1963–65) I have championed the temporal character of the names of our gods. And the Old Israel should not have known this also? It has. Only the Old Israel has established a second form. One God alone! Your trinity is defection, is paganism. But also the Jews came among the pagan peoples. In the midst of history Abraham appears, looks about, sees the many peoples, and the confusion of peoples, and comes to believe that out of all these peoples one single one will arise. He believes that he himself will have to at least plant the seed thereof. He comes in the midst of time; God has already created the peoples and permitted them to proceed into a state of con-
fusion. Now Abraham appears and after him, even into the final epochs of history, his effect is to continue. In this there is trinity also. There, too, is a beforehand, a middle and an end in which God reveals himself in different ways. Only the relation of individual to people is inverse. The Jewish people and the individual Jew are in inverse ratio to the Christian and the Holy Ghost. In every Christian the cross must be newly implanted, newly accepted, and suffered anew personally. Then he can found a people, a community, can undertake to convert. Thus the missionaries, thus the apostles went to the ends of the earth, imbuing and inspiring one people after another with the Holy Spirit. Thus did the religious orders spring from the spiritual loins of these brothers of Abraham, God’s people, such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, Redemptorists, but also Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Lutherans and many, many more. For the Jew it is the reverse: the individual Jew is born into Israel, into the People of God. That people already exists, and the Jew hence does not have to occupy himself further with the origin of this Jewish people which on Mount Sinai received the revelation and the indication of its proper course. Thus God appears as one only. But for the other peoples which look at Jewry the Jew seems only a member of his people. The individual Jew – is simply also a Jew. So are they all, it is said; all Jews are cast into the same basket without exception. Why? Because in the Old Alliance the second person of the Divine Revelation came about in the form of the people.” Not an individual was summoned, not an in-
individual suffered, but the Jews suffer and they are still suffering today; the Jews were cursed, and they are still being cursed today; the Jews suffered pogroms and are harassed and hounded from one country to the next, and their temple is destroyed and they are scoffed at. "The Jew. The individual—Hitler carried that out at absurdum—
even without distinction of personal religious faith, was as a Jew massacred, gassed, murdered, tortured, tormented, jeered at.

Is there no trinity? Is not also God there first who created the world, and Adam and Eve, who then engages himself in the history of peoples one believes
and someone who believes in him, and him that eternity will now be upon his side, that he will have endless time. And with this act in the history of creation that had already been created by God, there comes into force, also for the Old Alliance, an actual trinity; for the individual Jew now knows as a Jew that God is his Father, and the others— the goyim, the Gentiles, the "peoples"—they know nothing of that. Israel does not recognize at all that among the others "that same road—God, people, individual—can be trodden; that road is reserved for the Jews. The others?—they are addressed individually that they must behave well; but they do not share his previous history, they do not share his being called (people) they do not share his salvation. I believe, therefore, that there are two trinities involved—for the Jews the sequence is: God, Israel, Israelite; for the Christians the sequence is: God, Soul, People.
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Is that no trinity? Is not also God there first who created the world and Adam and Eve, who then engages himself in the history of peoples one who believes and summons anyone who believes in him, and him that eternity will now be upon his side, that he will have endless time. And with this act in the history of creation that had already been created by God, there comes into force, also for the Old Alliance, an actual trinity; for the individual Jew now knows as a Jew that God is his Father and the others - the goyim, the Gentiles, the "peoples" - they know nothing of that. Israel does not recognize at all that among the "others" that same road - God, people, individual - can be trodden; that road is reserved for the Jews. The others? - they are addressed individually that they must behave well; but they do not share his previous history, they do not share his being called out, summoned, they do not share his salvation. I believe, therefore, that there are two trinities involved - for the Jews the sequence is: God, Israelite; for the Christians the sequence is: God, Saint People.
When Gregory of Tours in the fifth century wrote his treatise on the "Vocation of the Peoples", he used the 69th Psalm in order to say that, as King David, every Christian who assigned himself a new task was embarking upon a task commanded by God, that this Christian was founding a new people. Thus there is, in a very beautiful manner, interpreted in a trinitarian sense this verse from the 69th psalm: "My Protector, in you I have placed my hope; you subdue my people for me." Says this is valid for every spiritual leader, it is valid also for every spiritual founder. I was very moved to find that this bishop from the era of the great migrations of the Germanic tribes had been brought to the point of applying the idea of the trinity to Jews and Christians alike without discriminating between their faith. He transferred from the Old Testament this trinitarian doctrine of David and his people to all spiritual generals, as he called them, as the "field marshals of God's Spirit". I believe it is time now for the translation into Greek, i.e., he keeps the past millennium from getting anywhere with the trinity. I have never understood how one could be a Christian without taking the trinity in dead earnest in this tremendous spiritual struggle of the centuries. Now I have understood, however, that it is probably only possible to get ahead and to retrace our steps into the genuine tradition of our faith from the beginning of the world, if we bring the Jewish and the Christian trinity into harmony and if we dis-
cern that also to David was given his people, and to Abraham was given his people, and to Moses was given his people by the Spirit of God. Every individual Jew, therefore, when he looks at these, his founders, will have to acquire an understanding for the necessity of defending the People of God among the peoples with the doctrine of the trinity. Nothing else works in opposing the primordial dream of the peoples which makes them say: we have always been with God, and hence we need not perceive any other voice. This dream must be opposed by saying that in the bright light of history God has continued to create over and beyond the old peoples and their dispersion.

The Old and New Testaments agree that God ever continues to create. The humans, which he finds existing mostly believe to have been created much earlier than in their own time. They limp along behind God's new acts of creation; they are pre-Jewish, pre-Christian. It can be said of the Nazis that they tried very hard to live in an age three thousand years before Christ, hence before Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Today many would like to march back to Egypt just as if the entire revelation had never taken place. The trinity is a call that God in the midst of history is creating amazingly anew, is creating a new people in addition to the old dreaming peoples who claim to have been on this earth from time immemorial.

I shall make this clear by telling a story. When Paul turned around before Damascus, gripped by the new truth which he had fought against previously, this happened in such a way that in the language of the
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Biblical the scion of David calls out to him: "Saul, my Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He recognizes suddenly that he is playing the part of King Saul in the Old Testament, and that Jesus is the David who as in the Bible, in the Old Testament, asks his king: Why do you persecute me? You have to admit that I am ahead of you in the spirit of peace and in the spirit of justice!" And the moment Saul of Tarsus recognizes himself as King Saul of the Old Alliance he suddenly comes to see God does not simply do one thing after another. That person, Jesus of Nazareth, who died yesterday, whose followers he had persecuted until now, is as yet to come and therefore far ahead of him, of Saul of Tarsus living on that day. Saul (1:1); King Saul and Saul (2:2). Only here the doctrine of the trinity regains its full power. When we see that thanks to this doctrine the relationship of time between God and man is reversed. What for us follows, comes later - the younger human being, the new born generation, the vintages/beatniks, or the semi-strong" (die Halbstarken), as the Germans call them - , all this can be quite outmoded and quite old in relation to God's time in history; "later" does not mean "better", nor means "previously" "worse" Neither does "previously mean "better", but God's engagement in time poses to you and to me the question - and that holds for both, Jews and Christians - : Is only he who was created after me superior to me, or is it him whom God already created before me and already let suffer and let live? Who really is alive? The reconciliation of the trinitarian dispute between Jews and Christ...
Stians seems to depend on this: both sides must see that through God's intervention something that did long since occur is revealed to be still awaiting us in the future. Thus time takes on a different quality than it had before, when it consisted merely of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Such a naive clock division has nothing to do with the actual "today" of God. The most splendid event has already happened, and is awaiting fulfillment by us. The revelation on Mount Sinai proclaiming one single God for all peoples, forbidding to transfer his name on the delusions, on the idolatry of an individual myth of a people or of an empire is stated in the Old Testament for all times - and the Jew believes fervently that some day all peoples will accept this. In Christ there has already appeared the revelation of how this faith in the living God must be incarnated.
by the story of Saul and Jesus before Damascus may be an opening, a gate through which the reconciliation between the doctrine of the trinity and the old doctrine of the only God of the Old Testament start.

When Jesus was baptized, the evanglist tells us, a dove hovered over Jesus. This dove symbolizes the Holy Ghost. Very few people seem to know today that up to the baptism of Jesus the dove was the symbol of the Old Israel. Every Jew at the time of Herode knew this, however. The dove hovering over Jesus tells us therefore also that in Jesus the whole of Israel is now incarnated. The evanglist's change of symbol clearly indicated the advent of a new day of history. If Israel can be symbolized by the dove, just as the third person of the trinity the Holy Ghost, is symbolized by the dove, then also Israel has a trinitarian faith. As a people, in the symbol of the dove, it represents the Holy Spirit of God and imparts it to its individual corporate members, to every Israelite.

If our gospel commentaries and our elucidations of the Old Testament were symbol minded they would have long since grasped the unity implied by Israel being symbolized as a dove, and the Holy Ghost being symbolized as a dove as well. Surprisingly, I have found this expressed only in the invaluable commentary on the Book of Genesis by Benno Jacob published in 1934. This very remarkable work deserves much wider acclaim. In this work the unity of the unity of the Old
Testament is wonderfully presented. What I have now attempted, complementing Benno Jacobs's teaching, is to put before you the unity of experience God as a trinity of the Old and the New Alliance in the W einheit. Elsewhere, I have shown that "three" is the largest extension of oneness that our mind is able to fathom, whereas "four" is the smallest expanse of manyfoldness. But this, anybody interested in the working of the mind may look up for himself. 1)

But the Jew who says that all the Jews of all times have been present at Sinai, solves his trinitarian difficulty with the same hyperbolic salto as the Cherubinischer Widerspruch Angelus Silesius formulated the Christians: "If Jesus was born a hundred times and was not born for you, yet would you be lost."

But what a story it is in retrospect! Before the Exodus of Moses the Egyptians worshipped the falcon, this falcon God Horus who swept all Egypt before him, on his passage from the first cataract of the Nile down to the Delta. Horus the falcon and Pharao the King if the Great House of Horus were one and the same, the creator God of Egypt. In the Mosaic protest the Old Testament translated the annual Horus journey into the one time Noah event. It replaced the annual flood of the Nile by the once for all times flood of Noah. And in describing pointedly this replacement, the divine falcon of Egypt became the Haven of the Noah story. The narrator of Genesis must have had a wonderful time.

1) Die Übermacht der Räume (= Soziologie I, 1956) deals explicitly with these facts.