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## **From a Sacrificing Society towards a Praying Community: A Movement within Hellenistic Judaism as a Model for Today's Christianity?**

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**Abstract:** Based on his personal experience in India, the author studies the transition from a “sacrificing society” to a “praying community” within the Hellenistic Judaism. Then he tries to apply it to today's church. First the author shows how the ancient Israelites made and experienced the shift from a religion of Jerusalem centred cultic offerings to a world-wide spread Jewish community with common and private prayers as focus of their identity and solidarity. Then he raises the question if this process may function as a model for our future hope, faith and life.

In Jewish history, as opposed to the Jerusalem temple, the “synagogue universalized official Jewish ritual practice while democratizing worship by taking it out of priestly hands. Thus the way was opened for any Jew anywhere to participate and officiate in the recognized communal ritual. Moreover, the synagogue radically changed the content of this ritual, shifting the focus from sacrifice and libation to Torah study and prayer.” Prayer henceforth was seen as the appropriate divine service and not seldom was it called “offering of the lips”.

The author contends that today's Christianity in principle finds similar preconditions and chances. Communal as well as individual prayers can have the power to build the inner centre of Christian existence, the gospel offers more than enough models of prayerful actions and attitudes in daily life which at the same time lead to compassion and solidarity.

**Keywords:** Hellenistic Judaism; Model of Church; Prayer; Praying community; Sacrifice; Synagogue; Temple; Temple cult.

“Pray for us”. Never will I forget these three words, which were the most expressed wishes by students as well as JDV<sup>1</sup> staff members and friends on the occasion of my farewell in February 2008. It was a farewell after sharing 25 days of hospitality, friendship and teaching in JDV and Papal Seminary with colleagues and students. But these 25 days were also determined by common fear and – much more – solidarity. In various parts of India Christians in those days were persecuted and killed by Hindu fundamentalists, holy masses were disturbed, churches got devastated. In Pune we felt absolutely safe and secure, but many students had friends and relatives in dangerous areas. Among the students and staff within and around the whole campus I experienced a wave of Christian – or better, Christian motivated human – sympathy and solidarity with the victims. The solidarity got its expression in material collections for the victims as well as in common prayers for them, but also for Christian communities and the ability for peace and respect between religions and peoples in general. I was deeply affected by this atmosphere, which brought the “power of prayer” and its necessity afresh into my mind.

In this article I shall show how the ancient Israelites made and experienced the shift from a religion of Jerusalem centred cultic offerings into a worldwide Jewish community with common and private prayers as focus of their identity and solidarity. By doing this I shall furthermore discuss if this process may function as a model for our future hope, faith and life.

## **1. Israelite’s Temple-Cult and its Early Prophetic Criticism**

Literally taken (see 2 Kings 22f.), at least with King Josiah, who made a cultic reform in Judah in the year 622 BCE, the temple for Jahweh in Jerusalem was the only legitimate place for Israelite and Judaic religious worship. At the same time this temple and the cultic action in it – and with this Jerusalem as the “holy city” – became the

most important element of Israelite identity. According to extra-biblical historical and archaeological sources this was only the case in postexilic Judah. Before the exile neither a monolatric Jahweh-alone-worship of the whole society nor Jahweh-worship only in Jerusalem was practised.<sup>2</sup> And even after the exile the cultic centralization on Jerusalem was only important for those living in the first Persian (539 – 333 BCE), then Hellenistic (333 – 63 BCE) province of Judah. For them the new restored temple of Jerusalem in fact was their social, economic, political, cultural and religious centre.

But also since exilic time quite a number of former Israelite or Judaic people already found a new life in other parts of the world, first of all in Babylonia, Egypt, Syria and Anatolia. For them Jerusalem and the temple could only be a symbolic and mental or even spiritual focus, but never the centre of orientation for their daily life. They had to find other ways to express their religious identity, which were firstly the written materials of Torah and Prophets and secondly new forms of common prayer. Rooms for studying and teaching the Torah were adapted, organized Jewish communities within the bigger cities were founded and times for common prayer were fixed. Around the end of the 4th century BCE then the first synagogues as houses of both study and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and common prayers, were built. The temple in Jerusalem therefore for the Diaspora-Jews – who in good time became the majority of Judaism – more and more lost its direct influence and importance.

On the other hand the enlarging gap between rich and poor population in Judah itself and the growing lack of social justice and solidarity among the Judeans more and more led prophetic circles to a serious critique of the temple cult and its authorities even in Jerusalem. The combination of political and religious power at the temple, which was shared by the priests and aristocrats, more and more indeed did cast a dark shadow also upon the cult at that same temple. The often “theocratic” called constitution of the Persian and Hellenistic province of Judah was questioned by the ordinary people who suffered from its oppressions and taxes. “What God expects are not burnt offerings, but social justice and solidarity. Not formal

rituals out of habit, but deeds out of faithful fear of God is real religious service as God himself likes it”, therefore was the main message of critics of these circumstances who first of all were found among the prophets. Some prominent examples are the following:

Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot endure; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Isa 1:10-17; King James Version).

That these words are postexilic and presuppose the social circumstances of Second-Temple-Judah – even if they are included into an eight century prophecy – is common sense among the Old Testament scholars.<sup>4</sup> Already the address is more than clear and direct to the point: Those here in God’s view are awaiting the same fate as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, namely irrevocable and definitive destruction. Normally offerings lead to forgiveness of ones sins and to a renewal of the relationship with God (cf. Lev 4:1-5:26). But if offerings are brought to the temple only out of habit and if the participation at offering-celebrations is only used as a folkloristic act, this cult will and can have no positive effect. On the contrary, God even hates such a behaviour. It can only lead to an

irreparable situation. The prophet clearly states that well done offerings are not only a question of a ritually correct act, but first of all a matter of a fitting and appropriate inner attitude. Even prayers will not be heard by God, if they are spoken without real and true repentance. Earning God's grace is only possible, if one acts according to also the social laws of the Torah; offerings alone are too little. In the given context the expected action of the addresses is clear: Reversal from ignorance and selfishness towards active solidarity with the outlawed and deprived as well as the helpless and powerless. Widows, orphans and other oppressed people are named as the most important examples, but not as the only poor and deprived groups of that time. Solidarity is the first commitment of Jahweh's Torah and covenant.<sup>5</sup>

Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. (Isa 66:1-4; King James Version).

Westermann in his commentary rightly states that the prophet with this speech speaks against those – mostly priestly – early postexilic authorities, who sought all the salvation and grace for Juda in the rebuilt temple alone.<sup>6</sup> Isaiah in this understanding functions as an important corrective to texts like Hag 2:15-19, which present the second temple as the beginning of the kingdom of God.<sup>7</sup> The time of salvation begins – thus the prophet's faithful certainty –

not first of all with the construction of a building, but much more with spontaneous care for the poor and needy combined with a longing for God's word. As the first element – solidarity and social engagement – is to be seen in parallel with Isa 1:10-17, so shows the latter – trembling at the Torah – a new pious alternative to the temple cult, namely studying and reciting the law, covenant and instructions of God. In the eyes of Jahweh those who practise solidarity and prayer are much more important for the kingdom of God than those who only think of the temple cult. The tradition of ritual offerings then is sharply criticised by even polemising against it through the prophet's words: With four comparisons of official offerings with idol behaviours the author of Tritoisaiah points out the meaninglessness and uselessness of temple offerings which are not rooted in hearing and obeying the will of God himself. If the temple cult is only practised as a usual rite, but not a sincere expression of an inner attitude which is also shown through acts of charity and solidarity, it is nothing more or better than idol worship. This is the message of Isaiah in the present passage and not – as Westermann thinks<sup>8</sup> – a general judgement against idol worship. We have absolutely no archaeological or historical evidences of children- or dog-offerings in postexilic Judea. But we do have evidence of religious and political selfish temple authorities and Jerusalem aristocrats, who lived their luxurious life at the poor people's expense.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel;  
Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and  
eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor com-  
manded them in the day that I brought them out of  
the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sac-  
rifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying,  
Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall  
be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I  
have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.  
But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but  
walked in the counsels and in the imagination of  
their evil heart, and went backward, and not for-  
ward. (Jer 7:21-24; King James Version).

Jeremiah goes a step further than Isaiah by stating that God even did not command offerings. For him keeping the Torah is not only the precondition for a serious and effective cult, but it is the only God-given requirement for the maintenance of the covenant. Israel's primary duty is the fulfilment of the religious and social commandments long before or even *instead* of the temple-cult.<sup>9</sup> Offerings – which are practised by Second-Temple-Judah – are indeed allowed, but not required, whereas listening to the divine word and fulfilling deeds of charity and solidarity – which the prophet is missing in the Judean society – are indispensable preconditions for the validity of the so-called “covenant-formula”<sup>10</sup> and with this for the wellbeing of Israel as God's people. Such radical kind of cult critique is found in a similar context also in Hos 6:4-7 and in Mic 6:6-8.<sup>11</sup>

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. (Am 5:21-24; King James Version).

“Justice and righteousness instead of offerings and cultic feasts” is the prophetic programme of Amos as well. The harshness in God's words of refusal and rejection of Israel's temple cult is indeed beating all the other criticizing prophetic texts, as Deissler – among others – rightly states.<sup>12</sup> Like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah, Amos also does not prohibit or demonize temple offerings in general, but he too relativizes their importance and often stressed monopoly of significance within the Judaic religion. However, in view of texts like Jer 7:21-24 or Am 5:21-24 Deissler's statement, that temple cult and Torah build the two focusses of an ellipse,<sup>13</sup> in any case is too far-reaching. Whereas fear of God and doing justice and solidarity in the opinion of such prophetic circles are constitutive elements of Israelite religion, offerings are seen as good, but more voluntary. To say it strictly to the point: Prophets of the Second-Temple-Period in general were of the opinion that the Judaic religion

can survive without a temple-cult rather than without the Torah. The one and only constitutive feature of a common Jewish identity in their eyes lies in the keeping of the divine commandments revealed to Moses in Sinai, at which they obviously only refer to the theological and social, but not to the cultic parts of the Moses' Torah. Whatever that may be, in any case, they opened the way to a later non-cultic Jewish Jahweh-worship without a temple.

## 2. Qoheleth and His Pleading for Prayer

Qoheleth, a Jerusalem sage towards the end of the third century BCE, goes a clear step further. He offers a far-reaching concept of an appropriate religious service, which grounds in the hermeneutics "prayer instead of offerings". Whereas all the cited prophets did see a value in cultic offerings under certain conditions, Qoheleth denies any meaningfulness of temple offerings in general. His more spiritual model of an appropriate human-divine relationship is demonstrated in Qoh 4:17-5:2, the social and political background for his critique of sacrifices has its roots in exactly the same Second-Temple-Society as that of the above cited prophets. He expresses the situation of ordinary people during this time in very sharp words:

And furthermore I observed under the sun:  
the place of judgement – there is wickedness,  
and the place of justice – there is wickedness.  
I spoke in my heart:  
God will judge the righteous and the wicked,  
for a time for every matter and about all deeds is  
there. (Qoh 3:16f; translation by myself)

Even at the court of justice injustice against those of a lower social status prevails. Qoheleth with this statement points to grievances in the Jerusalemite jurisdiction in general and to rough abuse committed by single judges in particular. "Bestechlichkeit der Richter ist hier genauso im Blick wie Willkürjustiz und die rechtliche Zementierung einer Politik, die die weitere Ausbeutung einer armen



Mehrheit durch eine sich auf brutale Weise bereichernde Minderheit forciert.”<sup>14</sup> Facing this situation Qoheleth sees a chance for final justice only through an act by God, of which he is convinced. “Here the ‘judging’ of God should be understood in the sense that God brings justice to the ‘righteous’ and condemns the ‘evildoer’. ... Thus miscarriages in the administration of justice (v. 16) are eliminated, and a ‘just order’ is reestablished.”<sup>15</sup> When and how God will perform this act is not further clarified, but it is in any case a divine act which brings a radical changing of the fates. As such this text is both hope for the poor and oppressed as well as a serious warning for the rich and evildoing judges and temple officials.

Another text pointing in the same direction is the following:

And I turned back,  
and I considered all the oppressions that are done  
under the sun.

And behold:

Tears of the oppressions – but there is no comforter  
for them.

And from the hand of those, who oppress them, vio-  
lence goes out,  
but there is no comforter for them.

And I praised the dead, who are already dead,  
more than the living, who are still alive.

But better than both of them is he, who has not yet  
come into existence,

since he has not yet seen the evilness,  
which is done under the sun.

(Qoh 4:1-3; translation by myself)

As in the above text, here as well social circumstances come into view, which can be experienced in daily life. The expression “all the oppressions” does not only point to the big number, but even more so to the variety of the visible evilness.<sup>16</sup> Corruption, overreaching and even violence became presentable ways of behaviour among the upper-class members at the poor people’s expense. Qoheleth’s

criticism of such circumstances again is very harsh. “The repeated indication that no one intervenes against oppression (‘and they have no one who comforts them’) shows ... that not only the ‘oppressors’ are responsible for unjust conditions, but also all the members of the community who could render help but do not do so ... . For everyone who is in a position to comfort ..., which if necessary and possible includes real assistance, is obligated to act.”<sup>17</sup> From these ensuing sentences Qoholeth sometimes has been interpreted as having a negative view of the world and human life in it in general.<sup>18</sup> But they should be understood within their very context. The expressed option for the already dead and not yet born over the people present and alive is not meant as a statement of general value, but more according to an existence under the above mentioned social and economic conditions. Such an understanding also the end of the pericope indicates, at which those, who have not yet come into existence are praised, because they have not yet seen such evil. The character of these verses is ironical and appellant at the same time. “Wenn jemand, der den Wert des diesseitigen menschlichen Lebens sonst so betont wie der Koheletautor, plötzlich solche Worte finden kann, dann müssen diese die Leserinnen und Leser aufrütteln, ja Betroffenheit und entsprechende Reaktionen bzw. Verhaltensänderungen hervorrufen. ... Wenn Gewalttätigkeit der einen und unbeteiligte Gefühlskälte der anderen Menschen zur Normalität werden, dann pervertiert der Mensch selbst den Wert und Sinn des Lebens.”<sup>19</sup> Thus understood, these words by no means are meant as a manifest of resignation, but rather as a call for conversion to fellowship, compassion and solidarity.

That such a reversal must go hand in hand with an appropriate divine service Qoholeth is deeply convinced of. The corresponding recommendation he offers in Qoh 4:17-5:2.

Watch your foot when you go to the house of the  
God,

but draw near in order to hear.

A gift of fools is a sacrificial offering,

but they do not understand that they are doing  
something bad.

Do not be rash with your mouth,

and let your heart not be too hasty to bring a word  
before the God.

For the God is in heaven and you are on earth,  
therefore do not make many words.

For the dream comes with a multitude of toil,  
and the voice of a fool with a multitude of words.

(Qoh 4:17-5:2; translation by myself)

Qoheleth starts his advice with a double call to be careful when entering the house of God on the one hand, but nevertheless to draw near to the house of God on the other hand. What at first glance seems to be somehow contradictory, is absolutely intelligible if seen and understood in its full context. That people have to and do go to the temple<sup>20</sup> Qoheleth takes for granted. According to Krüger this verse “advises readers to be careful when they go to the Temple”<sup>21</sup>, but they also “warn against thoughtless rushing to the temple”<sup>22</sup>. Whenever one enters the temple he should absolutely be aware of what he is doing and why he is doing it. Visiting the temple requires careful consideration and a clear goal. How exactly people are supposed to conduct themselves there is clarified and substantiated in the next verse. “First, they are to go into the temple ‘in order to hear’. ... This presupposes that in the temple there is something to hear. ... In any case, in relation to the ‘hearing’, the ‘sacrifice’ is of less value – if it is not rejected entirely.”<sup>23</sup> Maybe that this “hearing” also refers to hymns and readings from sacred writings, as Krüger states,<sup>24</sup> but the next verse makes it quite plain that here first of all an inner hearing of God’s voice is in view. Such a kind of hearing of what God has to say is then brought into sharp contrast to – mostly thoughtless – cultic slaughtering. “Nicht die äußere Kulthandlung, sondern die innere Bereitschaft, auf Gott und sein Wort zu hören, ist also für den Koheletautor beim Besuch des Gotteshauses entscheidend.”<sup>25</sup> With words harsher than any prophet’s critique Qoheleth concludes that temple offerings are foolish actions. The fools bring goods for burnt offerings to the temple, whereas the wise people draw near to hear God’s real will. It is noteworthy here that in the context of wisdom scriptures like Qoheleth the term “fool” almost always includes meanings like “evil-doer” and “unjust”,

“wise” correspondingly “God-fearer” and “just”. Nevertheless the remark that the fools do not understand that they are doing something bad “expresses ... a certain forbearance toward ‘the fools’: they do not know any better.”<sup>26</sup> For the understanding, however, Qoheleth recommends a reasonable temple visit, which means hearing of God’s voice as the first goal.

This viewpoint he again underlines with his second direction, not to make too many words. With this Qoheleth offers a somehow revolutionary concept of appropriate and meaningful prayer. Praying is rather listening than speaking, is more being addressed by God than addressing him. In this advice “the traditional wisdom ideal of restraint in speech in the interpersonal realm is carried over into the relationship with God: also in dialogue with God, the ‘fool’ betrays himself by making many words.”<sup>27</sup> The reason given for such kind of caution in direct contact with God is the fact that God dwells in heaven, whereas the humans live on earth. Against many commentators the thus expressed distance in no means points to an image of God as a distant despot who has no contact with human beings,<sup>28</sup> but it merely reminds those who pray appropriate respect in relation with God. “Gott ist eben jemand, zu dem man nicht irgend etwas sagen soll, sondern gut reflektierte und ihm angemessene Worte. ... In diesem Sinne wäre es auch gar nicht notwendig beim Gebet zu eilen, da Gott einerseits zeitlich nicht eingeschränkt ist, und andererseits dem Gebet ... ja auch nicht ... die Funktion zukommen kann, Gott sozusagen zu einem bestimmten Tun zu zwingen. Vielmehr ist es eine Möglichkeit des endlichen Menschen, sich mit dem unendlichen Gott in angemessener Weise in Verbindung zu setzen.”<sup>29</sup> And finally there is no need to explain to God every detail, since he already knows about our sorrows, troubles, wishes and needs. Therefore hearing his answers is much more important than making too many words.

The concluding sentence seems to be “an already coined proverb that regards dreams critically ... in addition to wordy speech”<sup>30</sup>.

All things considered Qoheleth offers a new way of a God-pleasing divine service. Instead of cultic offerings he pleads for prayer and praying he defines as first of all hearing the voice of God. This concept agrees with the temple critique expressed by many

prophets and with their cry for more social justice as well, but it furthermore also shows an alternative kind of keeping the contact to God alive. Those who are willing and able to listen to God with honesty and open mind will also feel compassion and solidarity with the oppressed and they will oppose public injustice and violence.

### **3. The Final Shift in Jewish Worship after 70 CE**

Prophetical cult critique and the development of new concepts for an alternative divine service within the schools of Judean sages as Qoheleth on the one hand and the above mentioned already established synagogue traditions in the diaspora on the other hand helped the Jewish people to survive the crisis caused by the final destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. In contrary, out of the former Israelite cult-society arose the new Jewish prayer-community. Ways to keep the common identity without the temple cult in Jerusalem were already found. A part of some prophets' visions seemed to have come true: The Torah with its commandments and rules for a good life became the one and only centre of Jewish life, identity and religion. In Judah itself the few already existing synagogues got the same functions as those of the diaspora already had and new synagogues spread out. The rabbinic schools for Torah-study and interpretation gained much more importance and influence. Divine services of prayer finally took the place of the former temple cult and the Jewish religion in general became a matter of prayer, scripture and inner solidarity.

The latter is impressively demonstrated in Mishnah Abot (mAb) I.2: "Shimon the just used to say: On three pillars lies the world: on the Torah, on the cult and on deeds of charity" (mAb I.2; translation by myself). This falls absolutely into line with Qoheleth. Torah functions as the guideline for the whole life, prayer<sup>31</sup> is the appropriate way of keeping direct contact with God and deeds of charity and solidarity are the practical result of the other two pillars. Charity / solidarity here is not only understood as a help for some needy people, but as a real holistic mentality.<sup>32</sup> A few verses later Mishnah Abot again reminds us of Qoheleth: "Shammai said: Schedule fixed times for your Torah; speak less, but do much; welcome all the people with a friendly face" (mAb I.15; translation by myself). "Your Torah"

here means the daily portion of studying the Torah. Study of the Torah was understood “as the on-going revelation of God’s word”<sup>33</sup>, the favoured time for the daily study was the early morning upon awakening. “Speak less” refers to the same behaviour in everyday life as Qohelet’s advice concerning the prayer. Wise people do not make many words, but they act in a good and well reflected manner.<sup>34</sup> Concerning prayer Mishnah Abot says: “Rabbi Shimon said: Be careful while reciting the *Shema* and when you pray. When you pray, do not make your prayer to a fixed matter of form, but to a sincere beseeching before God” (mAb II.13; translation by myself). Whereas the carefulness by reciting the *Shema* consists in keeping the fixed time<sup>35</sup> and – since most people knew it by heart – the correct wording, with reference to prayer in general it refers to the inner attitude of the praying person and to the content. For the Rabbis it was always of great importance that prayers – even official common ones – do contain free elements for actual, personal and spontaneous words of the praying individuals.<sup>36</sup> This included of course also the possibility of hearing what God wants to say, as Qoheleth already demanded. Thus understood, prayers indeed were able to fulfil the former communicative task of temple offerings much better and Arndt’s insight that Israelite cult-institutions enable communication between humans and God<sup>37</sup> does first of all fit the synagogues. Till today both private and common worship for a pious Jewish way of life is important; Hoffman describes this matter of fact in orthodox tradition: “The primary expression of traditional worship is corporate. The Jew may pray privately any time, any place, and with any words, gestures or songs. But the Jew must pray with the community three time daily.”<sup>38</sup> The community prayer keeps the fellowship and solidarity among the praying Jewish community alive and symbolizes at the same time also the bonds tying together the Jews all over the world. But along with this – to say it again – also all the common prayers offer space for individual thoughts and words.

#### 4. Conclusion

“The synagogue universalized official Jewish ritual practice while democratizing worship by taking it out of priestly hands.”<sup>39</sup> Thus the way was opened for any Jew anywhere to participate and officiate

in the recognized communal ritual. Moreover, the synagogue radically changed the content of this ritual, shifting the focus from sacrifice and libation to Torah study and prayer.”<sup>40</sup> Prayer henceforth was seen as the appropriate divine service and not seldom it was called “offering of the lips”. God’s on-going revelation in this shifted Jewish tradition is noticed by studying the written and the oral Torah. Moreover the Torah constitutes a sentiment for the common identity of the Jews all over the world, which leads to solidarity among the whole Jewish community. Thus understood the corporate character of divine service is far-reaching; praying in such a context always – whether the prayer be individual or communal – means keeping contact with God in (mental) communion with all the other members of the whole Jewish family. Praying, therefore, also means praying for and with the others, which causes a deep-rooted sense of solidarity with them and closes the circle “Israel – synagogue – Torah – prayer – solidarity – Israel.” It is in such a focus that God himself is situated. This kind of common identity is working till today and the worldwide solidarity among the Jewish people is still unparalleled.

Today’s Christianity in principle finds similar preconditions and chances. Communal as well as individual prayers can have the power to build the inner centre of Christian existence, the gospel offers more than enough models of prayerful attitudes and actions in daily life which at the same time lead to compassion and solidarity. And last but not least is the salvation caused by Jesus Christ’s resurrection more than predestined for functioning as the crucial point of a common Christian identity of all Christians. The Christian family of course is much bigger than the Jewish and at the same time more divided into various denominations and groups. As a consequence of this, longing for power and influence not seldom is the main motive of the leaders’ actions, especially in those regions, where Christians are the religious majority. Within the catholic tradition during the last decades numerous – but still small – reactionist groups moreover turned back to a strong observation of pure ritual and cultic forms in their liturgy, which did not cause a sense of fellowship and solidarity, but separation and polarization. At the same time many people leave the church’s community by declaring religion as a private matter. All these developments – which mostly happen in regions of Christian majority – call the situation of Second-Temple-Judah into

remembrance. There are problems which challenge our today's Christian societies. For this process the shift within Hellenistic Judaism can again be a model for us. What we need is a reorientation by the achievements and benefits of those prophetic circles and theologians. The necessary theological, salvation-historical and spiritual preconditions we do have. And in addition we do have something more: There are Christian communities who already (or still?) are aware of the inseparability of "salvation – Jesus Christ – gospel – church – prayer – solidarity – salvation", a circle in whose focus God himself is situated as well and for ever. Such communities mostly are either found as small circles within Christian majority societies (private praying-groups etc.; cf. the Israelite and Judaic prophets) or in regions where Christians are in a minority situation. An impressive example for the latter I found at JDV campus in Pune.

As I already have stated at the beginning of this article, the Christian motivated solidarity in combination with a deep-rooted trust in the power of prayer which I have experienced there especially in February 2008, I will never forget. Fr. Kurien Kunnumpuram, to whom I dedicate this essay with gratitude and pleasure, is one of the most outstanding persons within this campus. It was he who discussed about security-strategies with the superiors of the houses in and around the campus, it was he who could describe the backgrounds of what happened in clear and appropriate words, it was him who nevertheless trusted in the power of prayer and it is he through whose life and work the unity of Christian studies, prayer and solidarity always becomes visible. I am proud of the privilege of knowing him and counting him among my fellows and friends. And of course, I do pray for and with him, the entire staff and students of JDV and all the people worldwide who trust in the common power of prayer and human solidarity. I deeply believe that this can and will be our future.

## Notes

1. Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV): Pontifical Institute of Religion and Philosophy, Pune, India, is where Professor Kurien Kunnumpuram has spent his whole academic life. It caters to the philosophical and theological formation of the Church leaders in India. Professor Andreas Vonach, the author



of this article, has been a regular visiting faculty and he begins this article on a personal note [Editors' note].

2. See e.g. KEEL / UEHLINGER, 1992, 426-429.
3. The reproach with which some people confronted Nehemia may shed some light on the social situation of Second-Temple-Jerusalem: "And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live. Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards." (Neh 5:1-5; King James Version).
4. Cf. KILIAN, 1986, 23f.
5. "Festfrömmigkeit und rite vollzogene Opfer helfen nicht weiter. Jahwes Forderungen müssen beachtet, die sich aus dem Bund ergebenden Verpflichtungen müssen eingehalten werden." (Ibid., 25.).
6. See WESTERMANN, 1976, 328.
7. Hag 2:15-19: And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat [=wine-press] for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you. (King James Version).
8. WESTERMANN, 1976, 328: "Es geht dann in V.3 um etwas ganz anderes, die Polemik gegen einen Synkretismus: die legitimen Jahweopfer ... werden eingehalten, daneben aber gehen verabscheuungswürdige Afterkulte einher. Es werden Menschenopfer dargebracht ... und Hundeopfer ...".
9. SCHMIDT, 2008, 185: "Wenn Opfer nicht von vornherein zum Glauben gehören, können sie für ihn keine grundlegende Bedeutung haben. Auf diese Weise wird die prophetische Kritik mit anderer, geschichtlicher Begründung durchgehalten oder weitergeführt."

10. The 19th century German exegesis coined the term “Bundesformel” for the common phrase “I will be your God and you shall be my people”.
11. Hos 6:4-7; King James Version: O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.  
– Mic 6:6-8; King James Version: Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.
12. Cf. DEISLER, 1985, 118.
13. Ibid.; “Es geht hier schlicht um den Stellenwert des Kultes in der Offenbarungsreligion. Anders als in den ‘Religionen der Völker’ wird er durch die Propheten aus dem alles bestimmenden Zentrum gerückt. In einem Bild gesprochen: Er ist nicht die Mitte eines Kreises, sondern nur einer der beiden Brennpunkte einer Ellipse, deren anderer (ebenso konstitutiver) Brennpunkt ‘Recht und Gerechtigkeit’ ist. Das mitmenschliche Ethos gehört als Mit-Konstituente (und nicht nur als Konsekutivum) zur Jahwereligion.”
14. VONACH, 1998, 231f.
15. KRÜGER, 2004, 91.
16. Cf. VONACH, 1998, 236.
17. KRÜGER, 2004, 95.
18. Cf. CRENSHAW, 1987, 106f.; Seow, 1997, 187.
19. VONACH, 1998, 237.
20. Since in third century BCE synagogues with established religious services were of course in use in many diaspora communities already, but not yet in Judah itself (cf. Stemberger, 2007, 257; Hoffman, 1994, 247), here the term “house of the God” without any doubt refers to the temple.
21. KRÜGER, 2004, 107, citing WHYBRAY.
22. Ibid.; the positive statement is to be held with Crenshaw, 1987, 116.
23. Ibid.
24. Cf. *ibid.*
25. VONACH, 1999, 46.

26. KRÜGER, 2004, 107.
27. Ibid., 108.
28. Cf. MICHEL. 1989, 286; LAUHA, 1978, 99; e.g. Already 1 Kg 8:27ff. clearly states that God hears from heaven prayers spoken in the temple.
29. VONACH, 1999, 47.
30. KRÜGER, 2004, 108.
31. The Hebrew word *abodah* literally means cult, but after 70 CE it was also in use for “prayer” (see Marti / Beer, 1927, 7f.).
32. “... die Liebestätigkeit, welche ein viel breiteres Feld umspannt als die Gerechtigkeit, die sich im Almosengeben erschöpft ..., da sie nicht nur wie diese dem Armen, sondern auch dem Reichen (z. B. in Krankenbesuch, Gastfreundschaft ..., Tröstung im Leide ...), nicht nur dem Lebenden, sondern auch dem Toten (Bestattung bes. fremder Toten ...) zugute kam, und nicht nur mit Geld und anderen Gaben abgemacht werden konnte, sondern auch persönliche Dienstleistung erforderte” (ibid., 8).
33. HOFFMAN, 1994, 252.
34. “Nicht auf die Worte, sondern auf die Taten kommt es an, ... nicht das Reden, sondern das Leben entscheidet” (ibid., 29).
35. The so called Shema is a prayer composed of Deu 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41, which from rabbinical times on was seen as the jewish profession of faith. Therefore the recitation of it twice a day (morning and evening) was – and still is in orthodox Judaism – required from every pious Jew.
36. For more details see STEMBERGER, 2007, 264f.
37. ARNDT, 2007, 194: “Die israelitischen Kulteinrichtungen ermöglichen Kommunikation zwischen der Welt und ihrem Schöpfer: Sie ermöglichen das Gebet und die Erkenntnis dessen, der Gebete hört. Sie dämpfen und kanalisieren Seine Stimme, so dass diese den Menschen zum Leben dient und nicht zum Tode.”
38. HOFFMAN, 2004, 255.
39. When taking this as a model for today’s Christianity it should not be understood as a critique of priesthood; it only serves the insight that the more democratic and the less centralistic a believing community is organized, the more moral values like solidarity and fellowship are practiced voluntary. It is not a question of priests or not, it is a question of the form of organization and the possibilities of participation.
40. LEVINE, 1987, 7.

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