

## The Jewish Question in the Church

by  
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'A Jewish question certainly exists but Catholics are totally incapable of understanding it.' I found this view expressed in the *TRIBUNE JUIVE* of February 4th 1983, and it has been at the back of my mind ever since. It is very possible, and indeed highly likely that the Jewish problem as it is perceived and experienced by the Jewish community should be difficult for a Catholic to understand. Our incomplete appreciation of it, our reaction to it and the way we discuss it, all these are likely to be seen by Jews as inadequate and in any case alien, since we are seeing the problem from outside the Jewish community.

But there is another Jewish problem, the Jewish problem within the Church, and the same objections may well apply here. I doubt whether Jews can have any idea of its nature or what it means to us. In any case, it is we Catholics who have to live with it and who are best placed to assess it, and thus have the best right to speak about it.

### 1965: A Council Declaration

There would be no *Jewish question within the Church* had it not been for the recent modification of Catholic doctrine by which several traditionally Christian points of view have been quietly dropped and their place more or less taken by traditionally Jewish ones.

It all began with the Second Vatican Council — at least officially (for in this as in other matters the ferment was already at work behind the scenes; the Council invented nothing, but merely gave official recognition to such new 'insights' and vigorously helped to accelerate their spread in the Church.) In this connection we need to re-read the Council Declaration *Nostra aetate* 'On the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions', and in particular its fourth chapter: 'The Jewish Religion':

*'Given this great spiritual heritage common to Christians and Jews, it is the wish of this sacred Council to foster and recommend a mutual knowledge and esteem (. . .)'. The 'Jews should not be presented as rejected by God or accursed, as though this followed from Scripture (. . .)'. 'The Church . . . deploras all hatred, persecutions and other manifestations of anti-semitism, whatever the period, and whoever was responsible.'*

Many voices were raised at the time expressing regret, that this '*Declaration on the Jewish Religion*' — (they generally called it the '*Declaration on the Jews*', however) — should form part of the Council document on 'Non-Christian Religions' rather than being included in

the Decree on Oecumenism, i.e. on relations with other Christians. They even, according to René Laurentin<sup>1</sup>, recommended its inclusion as an appendix to the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*. They did not get their way here, but achieved their main aim nevertheless, thanks to an administrative arrangement fraught with consequences for the future, as early as 1965 in a paragraph whose implications were not fully clear at the time:

*'The essential point has been gained: relations with the Jews will not be handled by the Secretariat for non-Christian religions but by the Secretariat for Unity, and thus the full scope of the oecumenical problem will not be lost sight of.'*<sup>2</sup>

And the position in fact is that we have a 'Pontifical Commission for religious relations with Judaism' functioning as a dependent organ of the 'Secretariat for Christian Unity' and not of that concerned with 'Non-Christians' On the surface, this appears to be an illogical absurdity. In reality, it is evidence of an intention to move in a certain direction.

### **1982: A Papal Speech**

To study 'relations with Judaism', the Secretariat for Christian Unity convened a meeting in Rome in 1982, bringing together delegates from the bishops' conferences of the whole world as well as representatives of the Orthodox churches, the Anglican communion, the World Lutheran Federation and the World Council of Churches.

This meeting provided John Paul II with an audience for his speech of March 6th 1982 (repeating what he had already said on March 12th 1979 to a gathering of representatives of Jewish organisations and communities): *'Our two religious communities (i.e. Christianity, and Judaism) are linked at the level of their very identity itself; Christianity is 'a new branch on the common trunk' a traditional expression, but one which it is important not, to use one-sidedly - it needs to be properly explained if it is not to be wrongly understood. The Pope did not explain the expression in any way, but went on to invite Christians to 'gather with their Semitic brothers around the common heritage', for 'we have a considerable spiritual legacy in common'.*

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<sup>1</sup> In his 'Bilan de la 3<sup>o</sup> session' (Balance Sheet of the 3rd session) Seuil 1965, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Idem p. 87. — The activities of the Secretariat for Christian unity (sic) resulted in December 1970 in the setting up of an 'International liaison committee: between the Catholic Church and Judaism', the Catholic members of which were nominated by the Pope and the Jewish members by the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultations. This liaison committee led in 1974 to a further development: 'It was primarily from this committee' (declared an official note in *Osservatore Romano* on October 23rd, 1974), 'that came the proposal for the setting up at the Vatican, of a Commission for relations with Judaism.' The same official note announced the Pope's decision, setting up this 'Pontifical Commission for religious relations with Judaism' instituted 'as a distinct organism, but attached to the Secretariat for Christian Unity', and having as its chairman and vice-chairman the cardinal-president and secretary of the Secretariat for Christian Unity (sic). The creation of the new pontifical commission has not put an end to the existence of the Judeo-Christian 'International Liaison Committee', which continues to operate; but as from 1974 it has been the pontifical commission that has represented the Catholic side within that Committee.

Is there not a danger of confusion here? John Paul II makes it clear *‘especially to those who are still sceptical and even hostile, that this closer contact (with Jews) should not be confused with a certain religious, relativism’* and that it is necessary for us to safeguard *‘the clarity and distinctness of our Christian identity’*. But we find it astounding that the Pope should address this warning, as he himself says, above all to those who remain sceptical or hostile to a Christian-Jewish rapprochement; it is precisely these who run the least risk of allowing their Christian identity to be relativised or submerged. Such a warning should be addressed to those who do run that risk, and it should be made all the more explicitly and effectively in that what John Paul II is committing Christians to undertaking with the Jews is *‘a close collaboration to which we are called by our common heritage, namely the service of man’*. This CLOSE COLLABORATION did not figure in the Council document, any more than did the statement that we worship THE SAME GOD AS THE JEWS:

*‘Our common spiritual inheritance’* (John Paul II declared in his speech of March 6th 1982) *‘is particularly significant at the level of our faith in a single God, one, good and merciful, who loves men and leads them to love Him, the master of history and of the destiny of mankind, who is our Father and who chose Israel, the cultivated olive-tree onto which has been grafted the wild-olive branches which are the Gentiles.’*

We have two new ideas, then: those of THE SAME GOD and of CLOSE COLLABORATION, two ideas which seem to derive consistently from the logic of the Council (at least, I suspect they do), though the Council text did not go as far as spelling them out clearly, and they, have had to wait for John Paul II to incorporate them into the Church’s new, official attitude, and this at the price of a terrible ambiguity. In fact, the intellectual process making it possible to assert that Christians and Jews believe in the same God has led the Pope to the further step of claiming that Christians and Muslims, too, believe in the same God. The rationale here seems to be that (unlike the pagans of antiquity who had numerous gods, and modern atheists who have none at all), Christians Jews and Muslims share a common view of the Deity since they are all monotheists. This raises Interesting points of nomenclature and semantics for the lexicographers, and seems to lead to the view that any sincere and humble prayer that does not contradict this idea of one common God, or which does not contradict it too crassly, even if not always directed to the right heavenly addressee, will be graciously accepted by the same One and Merciful Godhead. But this is not the sum of our faith; it is barely even its beginning. For us, Jesus Christ is God, and has revealed to us that God is a Trinity; this is the God of Christians, who is not the same as that worshipped either by Muslims or Jews.

### **1985: Working with the Jews to Prepare the World for the Coming of the Messiah**

These two innovations of John Paul II, *‘the same God’* and *‘close collaboration’* are startling enough in themselves, but in 1985 the Holy See managed to give them an extension so wide as to be practically limitless.

I refer to a document dated May 1985 but published on June 24th of that year by the 'Pontifical Commission for religious relations with Judaism' and signed by its chairman of sad celebrity, Cardinal Willebrands. This document has been presented as being the fruit of three years' work; The Commission must thus have set to work just after the innovative speech of March 6th 1982. In fact its principal preoccupation has been to draw out the implications of John Paul II's two new insights.

The document consists of 'preliminary considerations' followed by six chapters and a conclusion.<sup>3</sup> This last reproaches Catholics for their '*distressing ignorance of the history and traditions of Judaism*'. It seems to me that the Holy See would be better employed deploring a *distressing ignorance of the history and traditions . . . of Catholicism*, but this it has not done; it is more concerned with 'ridding ourselves of the traditional conception', as it makes clear in its chapter VI.

*'The permanent survival of Israel, when, so many other ancient peoples have disappeared without trace, is a historic fact and a sign that must be interpreted in God's plan. We must in any case rid ourselves of the traditional conception of the punished people as a living argument for Christian apologetics.'*

Such a claim not to be a *punished* people is one that is quite foreign to Christianity. The whole of humankind, every people without exception is now experiencing the consequences - in other words the punishment - of original sin. Is the Jewish people the only one not . . . to be *punished*? We are certainly breaking here with '*the traditional conception*', and the rupture is a more fundamental one than appears on the surface.

We must of course make allowances for the empty verbiage that results from the intellectual decadence characteristic of our time of generalised obscurantism. But all the same, there is a meaning, a will, an intention in that abrupt imperative: '*We must in any case rid ourselves of the traditional conception*'. This is how the Church loses all its moral authority, for if it asks us to reject its traditional conception, this can only mean, that; it has been mistaken on this point for two thousand years; and if this is so, there is no longer any guarantee that it is not mistaken on the same point today.

Once the traditional conception has been rejected, the two new ideas of *the same God and close collaboration* are free to join forces to give birth to, a new messianic belief, Jewish messianism, which is now to take the place of Christian hope. The eleventh paragraph of the second chapter of the Commission's document (which I quote in its entirety below) at last brings this out into the open:

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<sup>3</sup> Its official title is 'Notes for a correct presentation of Jews and Judaism in the preaching and catechesis of the Catholic Church'. This document was read and approved by John Paul II, who ratified it as being in line with his own thinking in his speech of 28th October 1985. (Published In the UK as '*The Common Bond: Christians and Jews*'. cf. Supplement to *Approaches* No. 90: '*Is Catholic-Jewish Dialogue possible?*' Note added by Ed. *Approaches*.)

*'Attentive to the same God who has spoken, hanging on the same word, we have to witness to one same memory and one common hope in Him who is the master of history. We must also accept our, responsibility to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah by working together for social justice respect for the rights of persons and nations and for social and international reconciliation. To this we are driven, Jews and Christians, by the command to love our neighbour, by a common hope for the Kingdom of God and. by the great heritage of the Prophets, Transmitted soon enough by catechesis, such a conception would teach young, Christians in a practical way to cooperate with Jews, going beyond simple dialogue.'*

Thus in 1985 Rome is officially inviting Catholics to cooperate with the Jews to prepare for the coming of the Messiah<sup>4</sup> As for the conversion of the Jews, you may think about it if you really insist, but you must never mention it aloud, but follow Rome's lead and bury it under the profoundest silence.

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This development in the official attitude, starting with the Council Declaration of 1965, continuing with the pontifical allocution of 1982 and culminating in the Roman directives of 1985, has been slow, sure and coherent, and above all it has been carried out in silence. By this I mean that for the first time in history the Church is just not making any response when objections are raised to its policies.

This has been true, moreover, of the implementation of all the conciliar innovations. On all the other questions, any attempt to adduce reasons in support of the 'traditional conception' is likewise ignored. Debate never takes place. There was no debate on the Mass or on the Catechism. No Catholic argument was ever brought forward officially to justify the forbidding of the Roman Catechism, nor for the outlawing of the Traditional Mass. After twenty years of questions that were met only by silence, one is tempted to wonder whether the real reason was one that Rome did not dare to admit, and whether the real answer to all the questions that had been asked in vain did not in fact lie precisely in the Jewish question in the Church. In 1972 we had written publicly to Paul VI, stating our view that *'At present it is as though the Church Militant was a country occupied by a foreign power,'* Since that time the Church has not ceased to give the impression that it is an occupied Church. But occupied by whom? We are driven, today, to suspect that it is by Judaism, and that what is now coming but into the open is the goal which has been the objective of all the manoeuvres and persecutions of the last 20 years: namely, to obliterate or play down any conflict between the Christian and Jewish religions, and to establish a close religious collaboration with the Jews in order to

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<sup>4</sup> This idea, totally alien to Catholicism, is a traditional concept of Jewish theology in its view of the role of 'the religions derived from Judaism'. One official indication of this is the declaration made by the Grand Rabbinate of France on April 16th 1973, in which it recalled 'the teaching of the greatest Jewish theologians, for whom the mission of the religions derived from Judaism is to prepare humanity for the advent of the messianic era announced by the Bible'. In its directives of May/June 1985 Rome has thus allotted to Catholicism the place and the role assigned to it by Jewish theology.

*'prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah' by 'working together for social justice, respect for the rights of persons, and nations and for social and international reconciliation'.* What a secular programme! If that is what we must preach, what need do we have of a pope? The Grand Orient Lodge and the United Nations are enough.

It is true that the term and notion of *social justice* are specifically Catholic ones, essentially derived from the Church's teachings, but Catholics, and above all our bishops, have forgotten the origin of the term and the content of the notion. They are under the impression (to use Joseph Folliet's famous phrase) that they must try to *'outdo the Communists and travel faster than them along the road of justice and peace'*. Along that road, the social justice pursued by Catholics has become one strongly impregnated with Marxism. Social justice as purveyed by the media and preached in our pulpits is a heavily slanted concept; to invoke it without correcting this imbalance is merely to lead the peoples astray.

Likewise, it is no doubt true that the human person has inalienable rights. But human rights too are only understood in one sense nowadays by the media and in the pulpit: any appeal to such rights which does not firmly rectify this bias is bound to be seen as a reference to the masonic declarations of the rights of man.

The same God . . . Close cooperation with the Jews to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, and this, through the fight for social justice. So this is what *'renewal'* was leading to! We are dimly beginning to see what all the fuss was about.

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[The following addendum has been added by AdeM to the *Approaches* text]

### **Addendum**

#### **A Warning from Scripture**

We are reminded of Our Lord's admonition to His disciples to, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees." (Mt. 16:6) At first the disciples, who had no bread with them at that moment, did not understand. What did this talk of leaven in bread have to do with the Pharisees? Soon however, they grasped Our Lord's meaning: "Then they understood that He had not said that they should beware of the leaven of bread, but of the *doctrine* of the Pharisees and Saducees." (Mt. 16:12)

As Archbishop Alban Goodier S.J. explained in his classic commentary on this passage in Scripture, Our Lord was teaching the disciples to be on their guard against the *subtleties* of the Pharisees, which were far more dangerous than any opposition to Christ:

*It was not so much their opposition that He feared for His own, it was their [the Pharisees] **subtlety**. Before the Pharisees had blamed Him for His miracles and other good deeds; He knew that this would not take His friends away from Him. Now this*

morning they [the Pharisees] had come, with an affected simplicity, a show of desire to know the truth, an appeal to the **prophets, a zeal for tradition, a respect for law and obedience to the powers that be**; and all this, He knew, would be likely to affect His own, **more than any open enmity**. Like leaven unless they were careful, it would spread unconsciously among them.<sup>5</sup>

Like the disciples in their encounter with the Pharisees, we must be on guard against Pharisaical subtleties which have spread like poisonous leaven through the Church over the past fifty years. The Pharisees of old were dangerous precisely because they seemed to have a genuine respect for the truth.

(Excerpt from *The Devil's Final Battle* by Fr. Paul Kramer – p. 166)

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<sup>5</sup> Archbishop Goodier, S.J., *The Public Life of Our Lord, Jesus Christ*, Vol. I, (Burns, Oates and Washbourne Ltd., London, England, 1932) p. 462