



THE ROOTS OF ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT

WHY THE CHRISTIAN FAITH NEEDS JUDAISM

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Does Christianity need Judaism? When I was a boy, a question like this would have seemed to me unusual, probably not even worth asking. In my small Basque village, I never met a «wandering Jew». Once a year, the liturgy of Holy Friday made me pray «for the unfaithful Jews». When my mother took me to Bayonne to buy a good dress, from the tailor whom she said was a Jew, I was surprised to meet a man like all the others; and it was he, himself who packaged my first tunic! In the Seminary, on the «teaching of contempt» there prevailed that of the insignificance: the Jew did not count as anything, and I never perceived any religious need for Judaism.

I felt the first shock in the year of my priestly ordination, exactly 50 years ago, when I don't really know how, but there came to my attention the «10 points of Seelisberg», elaborated in Switzerland by a small group of Jews and Christians. Today, that text that was then so prophetic and courageous, now seems very banal. In 1965, as an expert of the Second Vatican Council, I admired the sweet abstinence of Cardinal Bea unfurl to vote on the declaration of the Jews in *Nostra Aetate*. Eight years later, when I was the Archbishop of Marseilles, a great port city in which there peacefully lived 80 thousand Jews and 80 thousands Moslems, I was with three other French bishops, it was a confirmation of one of the most open orientations on the relations with Jews that was offered, not without reflections, from an Episcopate. But, it was mostly from within the international Committee of liaison between the Catholic Church and the Jewish world where I learned up to which point the dialogue was difficult from one side and the other because of a profound asymmetry between the protagonists.

This preamble allows me to enter without delay into the heart of the question with vigor and rigor. Does Christianity need Judaism? The spontaneous response is yes, a sure and decisive yes, a yes which expresses the vital and visceral need. But, naturally, I cannot but answer in the name of my Church, "scrutinizing" its "mystery" according to the beautiful expression of *Nostra Aetate*, in the full respect of the various ways in which Judaism sees and defines itself. For me, Christianity cannot think of itself without Judaism, it cannot do without Judaism. From the beginning of his pontificate (March 12, 1979) in Magonza, Pope John Paul II dared to declare «Our two religious communities are tied to the same level of their identity». I remind once again (I was there) his striking words in the great Synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986: «The Jewish religion is not to us "extrinsic" but, in a certain way, it is "intrinsic" to our religion. Therefore we have towards it relations which we do not have with any other religion. You are our favorite brothers, and, in a certain way, we could say our older brothers».

These words, then, do not have anything new or audacious; they are inspired by the Pauline image of the Letter to the *Romans* (11, 16-24) of the good olive which is Israel on which the branches of the savage olive, who are the pagans, were grafted. And Saint Paul, the ancient Pharisee turned «apostle of nations» would then say to the pagan-Christian: «Do not boast over the branches; remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you» (*Rm.* 11, 18)...and the Jew who brings you. And is it not in the Gospel of John, that there is the want to imbue it with anti-Judaism, that Jesus solemnly proclaims to the Samaritan: «Salvation comes from the Jews?» (*John* 4, 22)? If it is really like this, how do we explain the fact that in the course of centuries so many Christians lived as though they had forgotten their roots, or worse despising their older brothers? I well understand the reaction of Rabbi Askenazi who said: «We are not even separated brothers, why have we never met». In fact, we all feel the painful wound which Fadiey Lovosky meaningfully called «the laceration of absence».

But then, by way of what miracle to Jews and Christians meet after 2,000 years, or get together to examine the upside down relations they have had in the course of history? Why was there a need for the Shoa to open the era of dialogue? To tell the truth, did the break not start with the "scandal" of the cross of Christ? The past inspired by Jules Isaac near John XXIII is certainly not extraneous to the starting of a late and still timid spring. Now we start to open our conscience to the fact that our Christian identity is an identity received by others, and that this other is the elected people, which exists only as derived by God. The act in progress goes a lot further than the simple constatation of the carnal Jewishness of Jesus, now easily affirmed on the part of everyone, with all the cultural consequences and cultural in the liturgy and in the life of the Church, today amply conceded to and without embarrassment of people, be it Jewish or Christian. John Paul II, yet again, when receiving last April 11, the Pontifical Biblical Commission recalled that we cannot fully express the mystery of Christ without going back to the Old Testament. From the second century, against Marcione, the Church gave witness to this vital relationship, which then followed very obscure, if not camouflaged. On my part, I love reminding that the Catholic Church consistently celebrates the feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple. And I will never cease to discover at which point my prayer, including the prayer which Christ taught his disciples, the "Our Father," is filled with Jewish citations and psalmodies. All within me breathes the mercy and the wisdom of the *anawim*, the poor of the Lord.

But this rootedness, however important, leaves still on the threshold of the problem, of the real problem against which I hit and for which I fight myself. That which frustrates me, that which today upsets me, is the perseverance of the Jewish people, notwithstanding the pogroms, its survival after the cremation ovens. Isn't that a witness of the invincible permanent vocation, of a timely meaning for the world, but especially in the same bosom of the Church? This is much more than discovering the richness of a common patrimony; it is scrutinizing in the design of God the mission which the Jewish people still have to and must always fulfill. What does it mean, to me, Christian, this permanent face to face which is the Jew? What does it mean for my Church this Jewish people that does not cease to make the Old Testament leap to a time which I though had become once and for all the time of the New Testament? Affirming, with Saint Paul, that the second Alliance did not cancel the first, why are «the gifts of God irrevocable?» (*Romans* 11,29), the Church reaches the point of recognizing in Judaism a saving function after Christ? For my Christian conscience, the comparison with the Jewish figure that up until now we had dissimulated if not undone, with this Synagogue in front of which we had closed our eyes, requires at the same time a

profound mystery and a gigantic challenge.

Speaking of "mystery" in the way of Saint Paul (*Romans* 11,25) means to recognize that the ultimate meaning of the history of salvation escapes us since its key is in God, and to admit that not all is clear, because not all is accomplished. Certainly, the Church clearly proclaims that Jesus Christ is the sole Savior of the world; and lives all of his being in his death and resurrection. But, is not the constant recurring of Israel the sign of this which is missing for the full realization of his mission? In front of the *now* of the Church, Israel is the witness of the *not yet*, of a Messianic time not fully concluded. The Jewish people and the Christian people thus, find themselves in a situation of contention or better yet of reciprocal emulation. When we Christians are happy with the *now*, the Jews remind us of the *not yet*, and this fecund tension is in the heart of the entire life of the Church, up to the point of reaching the Eucharistic liturgy, when every time the Church launches its striking yell: «Come, Lord Jesus». The Church announces, it already prefigures the "Kingdom," the city in which God will be «all in everyone», as Saint Paul said (1 *Cor* 15,28). It comforts us to know that this hidden Kingdom, this infinite space of salvation offered to everyone, surpasses by a great deal the visible limits of the Church. That which is not the "Sacrament", the place in which the Kingdom is celebrated by those who have already received it.

Karl Barth said: «The decisive question is not "what can the Synagogue be without Jesus Christ?" but instead "what is the Church if for so long it finds in front of it an Israel which is a stranger to it?"». Said in another way, for the Church the constant recurring of Israel is not only a problem of external relations that need to be developed, but a problem of internal relations that need to be deepened, a problem which touches the very being. The path on which we find ourselves runs along a hairpin, yet to be fully explored by the exiguities and by the theologians, but it is on this road, I believe, which we must proceed on, otherwise the Judeo-Christian dialogue will remain superficial, limited and full of mental reserves. This dialogue, it has been said, has just left the middle ages and cannot proceed if the interlocutors on one side and on the other side do not take account of the contemporaneity of the other. Christianity is the tree which grows from the seed of Judaism and covers all the earth with its branches, but the fruit of the tree contains again the same seed. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante invites the Jews to abandon their hopes: «Leave every hope». Franz Rosenzweig, shocked by that verse, commented: «When the Jew will appear in front of the celestial throne, he will be asked just one question: "did you hope in redemption?"» All the other questions, added Rosenzweig, «are for you Christians. From now on, let's prepare ourselves together, in faith, to appear in front of our Judge». To prepare ourselves together, we must consider ourselves all inheritors of the Bible, but I believe that to put to good and to fruit this heredity, Christians have in a particular way a need for Jews because the Jews have with Scripture a sort of carnal familiarity, because on the contrary of every dualism which emboldens, they are witnesses of the living unity of man called by God, so that they remain the people which destroyed idols and denounced ideologies, both ancient and modern. The Jewish Bible makes the entire world hear the voice of one God. Even where there do not live any Jews, but the Bible is proclaimed by the Church, the Jew is spiritually present because he is perceived by the nations which receive the divine Word as belonging to the people for whom the Lord made himself known on earth. If the target of neopaganism, the profound root of anti-Semitism, is the Bible which reveals in every man the image of God, we must today more than ever be a witness of our common faith of the Word and the Laws which structure every human conscience. We must climb together the holy mountain of Sinai and up there hold hands without batting an eye in front of the figure of God, completely occupied, like in a night of hurricane, to receive the water and fire from the sky to let ourselves be purified.

Must we not all be «dripping with the word of God», as Peguy said to his Jewish friend, Bernard Lazare? Are we not all like those primitives who received the Decalogue and thus becoming the true civilization of humanity?

This mysterious difference and this incredible kinship between the Jews and the Christians brings us together on the road of penance, of the *teshuva*. It is the fundamental biblical teaching, common to all of us. Because, Jews and Christians, we are all sinners, we go through history in the dualism of the Church-Synagogue produced by the hardening of each of us, each one being internal to the hardening of the other. It is in my spiritual experience in front of Christ, I tried to measure and to understand the distance which separated me from the Jew, without ever thinking of making of the Jew a "potential Christian."

It is true that Jesus divides us, that he is amongst us a sign of contradiction, a foot hole. I really like the astonishing formula of S. Ben Chorin: «The faith of Jesus unites us but the faith in Jesus separates us». Therefore, I dare to say - it is the profound truth of every paradox - that Jesus unites us in the same instant that he divides us. Because this laceration deals only with us. A Buddhist, a Hindu, have no reason to be called upon because of Jesus Christ: they never encounter him in their history. Even the Moslems, just barely touch upon him. But us, Jews and Christians, whether we want to or not, sooner or later, we are forced to ask ourselves in front of the world how to deal together with this internal laceration that there is amongst us, this laceration that is all ours and which provoked the first schism, that the exist (Claude Tresmontant) called «the prototype of schisms» inside one sole body of the family of God? Because, us and them, are the only ones who are able to pronounce the divine Word, which is spoken to all men, we also hang together on the same Word and the same witness of the same promise for all of humanity. In this sense, even the future of the ecumenical movement between the different Christian Churches is tied to the knowledge that the bond with Judaism is the test of faith of Christianity to the same God. F. Lovsky, in the last chapter of his book, speaks of the Judeo-Christian encounter in the intercession. And he states that our prayers - when we think of us and them - they are the prayers of our common sufferings and of our reciprocal resentments, but deplores the fact that they are not also the prayers of our complementary vocations. For as different as our prayers seem, they are related and must become sisters.

For my part, I never cease praying for the day when God will be «all in everything», (1 *Cor.* 15, 28), Jews and non-Jews. Such is the celestial Jerusalem that our prayer must speed the coming, the prayer of all of us in exile anywhere in the world ...also in Rome! Oh! Jerusalem, preferred by God, of you everyone can say: «Here is my mother, in you everyone is born» (*Psalms*. 97), and the nations climb towards the light. Oh, Jerusalem, I walk towards you.
Oh Jerusalem, «Strong and compact city» where all the sons of Abraham are reunited and in which the prayer for peace is concentrated (*Psalms* 122). Oh Jerusalem I walk towards you. Oh! Jerusalem, whose hills cry of desolation and dance with hope, Mount Moriah and Golgotha, Wall of the Temple and memorial Yad Vashem, empty sepulcher where the angel invites us to look amongst the dead for He who is alive (*Luke* 24, 5). Oh! Jerusalem, I walk towards you.
Oh! New Jerusalem, you who descends from the Heavens dressed like a bride on her wedding day, you who no longer have time, because you temple «is the Lord, the omnipotent God and the Lamb» (cf. *Apostles*, 21)! Oh Jerusalem of the Heaven, we walk towards you.

Beyond every personal form of witness, I remain convinced that my Christian faith, in order

to be faithful to itself needs the Jewish faith. From every Christianizing theology on Judaism and from every Jewishizing theology on Christianity, I tried to witness all that Martin Buber expressed so well: it is the Alliance of the same living God who makes us exist, Jews and Christians, and who creates a community beyond the breakage. «Judaism and Christianity - writes professor Karl Thieme - are both eschatological, but at the same time they have a place in the design of God. And from there derive the differences which separate the Jews and the Christians and the relations which unite them».

If the other is «a mystery and a challenge», the difference is the same essence of our encounter, and it is also the possibility of reciprocal listening and of mutual enrichment. Far from distancing ourselves one from the other, let's not cease meeting around the Messiah. Edmond Fleg teaches it to us in *Listen Israel*:

«And now together you are waiting
You that He comes and you that He returns;
But to Him you ask for the same peace
And your hands, whether He comes or He returns, to Him you tend to with the same Love
So then what does it matter? From one and the other he comes
Let Him Come
Let Him Come!»

Let Him come? The same Edmond Fleg, in another book (*Jesus as told by the wandering Jew*), stimulates everyone, Jews and Christians: «So that the Messiah comes, yell with me: happy are those who will throw away their arms, because they will bear the Messiah».

