

THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN CONTRADICTION

It Means Profound Differences in Approach to World Affairs

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In the ancient Good Friday liturgy of the Catholic Church, in the midst of incessant pleadings for all conditions of men, the following prayer is made: "Let us pray for the unbelieving Jews: that our God and Lord will remove the veil from their hearts, so that they too may acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Almighty, eternal God, who does not withhold Thy mercy even from Jewish unbelief, heed the prayers we offer for the blindness of that people, that they may acknowledge the light of Thy truth, which is Christ, and be delivered from their darkness: through the same Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen."

Not alone in receiving the attentive solicitude of the Church, the Jews are thus singled out for unique compassion.

Needless to say, I am under no illusion that the Catholic Church would alter its liturgy to conform to the reigning unbelief of contemporary culture. But that she should continue, in this age of "tolerance" and religious disinterest—a time when religion has become increasingly popular as it has become increasingly vulgar—to ask God's mercy on the unbelief of Israel is a fact I find extremely significant.

I find this fact particularly significant in view of the equally pertinent fact that Israel also maintains a liturgy of prayer on behalf of the unbelieving nations of the world. And these presumably include the nations in Christendom. Two prayers in the liturgy of Judaism come to mind immediately—not prayers attendant upon specific events or crises of faith, but general, daily, and repeated prayers.

The former of these prayers affirms that God never rejects His elect, that He will deliver His people from the midst of nations, that through Israel's unity the nations will come to worship and glorify Him alone; while the second prayer, the better-known *Alenu*, reaffirms the conviction of God's unity and prays that the world will be united under His dominion, that idolatry will wither and pass away, that "the inhabitants of the world may know and acknowledge that unto Thee every knee must bow, and every tongue swear; before Thee, O Lord our

God they shall kneel and fall prostrate; and all of them shall willingly submit to the power of Thy kingdom."

The prayer of Good Friday and the prayers of the synagogue, though directed to the same unity of belief, are obviously incompatible. And their incompatibility points toward profound differences between the Christian and the Jewish approaches to history and world problems. Where the Christian, with prophetic casuistry, reads Jewish hopes as having already been fulfilled, the Jew affirms that, pretensions to the contrary, idolatry persists, the nations are in unbelief, and only at the end of days will God's elect be fulfilled and history united under the dominion of heaven.

Where Christianity assumes fulfillment, Judaism denies it. Where Christianity affirms the completion of history (or at least the accomplishment of that instrument whereby history, in God's time, may be completed) Judaism insists upon the open, unqualified, and unredeemed character of history. In sum, where Christianity asks that Israel remove its veil, Israel insists that it is only delusion which imagines that the veil is removed or removable until a true Messiah appears to redeem the time.

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These theological differences, fundamental and irreducible, have been obscured in our day. At first glance it would appear that such obscurity is preferable to the bitter and rancorous relations between Judaism and Christianity which prevailed in previous centuries. We must, however, draw certain crucial distinctions before we succumb to the goodwill which dominates the present moment.

Goodwill may be profound or superficial—it may arise from the endless resources of human love or it may be the hypocritical gloss of human beings who don't care. It is essential to maintain, against the superficiality of contemporary Judaeo-Christian fraternity and brotherhood, the fact that Judaism and Christianity divide profoundly. This division is not repaired by the impermanent cement of sociology or the religious ignorance of contemporary man.

Judaism still asserts that history is not redeemed. Christianity still maintains that it is. This is a funda-

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mental and irreducible disagreement, which divides Judaism and Christianity to the end of time. But this difference is not without consequences for the conduct of world affairs. If the world is unredeemed, there is no normative principle against which to judge world order other than one which takes into account, fully and deeply, the unredeemed character of that order.

The Christ is, from the Jewish point of view, no guide to "the world"—because the Christ vanquishes "the world": "I have overcome the world." In this sense, the anarchism of the *Philokalia*, Father Zosima, and Dorothy Day are of a piece. History—"the world"—exists only to be rejected—it no longer conditions the saved.

The obvious fact that history *does* exist—in spite of the insistence of Christian radicals that its conditions be transcended—is, for the Jew, empirical evidence of a high order that history is not yet marked with the transforming power of the divine. For him, the only principle which can be used to judge history is one which asserts that history is still open—that its time has not come, that however closed from the vantage point of the Creation, it is open from the perspective of its end, consummation, and transfiguration. Where Christianity (in what I take to be its authentic forms) has made the possibility of a new salvation redundant, Judaism must keep it open, because history bears the seed of the true Messiah.

Where Christianity seems to be pessimistic about history, such pessimism is to my mind a betrayal of its own self-definition: there can be no real pessimism if there is a Church, a saving act, a divine intervention that has articulated the basis of reuniting fallen man to his source in God. Christianity should be optimistic.

Judaism, on the other hand, which seems imperceptibly optimistic (such optimism is a consequence of the incredibly shallow "me-tooism" which characterizes Judaism on the American scene), should be fundamentally pessimistic. Its pessimism arises from the fact that it has two tasks: to call out to the world's smugness and satisfaction, to unsettle history, to probe its idolatries, its arrogance, its sureness, and at the same time to guard against false hope, caution against deceiving apocalypticism, protect its trust from the disillusionment of false messianism.

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Judaism has, I would contend, betrayed itself. Such betrayal is, however, neither a new nor compelling phenomenon in Judaism. The destiny of Israel is self-betrayal and repentance—an endless rhythm of stupid back-sliding and regeneration.

Judaism has just passed through a century of back-sliding. The transparency of the German-Jewish

symbiosis ended in tragedy; the American-Jewish symbiosis (although, God spare us, not yet ended in tragedy) repeats the conspicuous pattern of historical Jewish back-sliding. It is no wonder that the Jew should back-slide in the Diaspora—for the Jew tends to live in two spheres: one, in which he is bound by supernatural ties that never yield to history or to nature; two, in which he is natural man, subject to the temptations of man—the passion for acceptance, wealth, comfort—all the vulgarity of the human order.

There is unending tension between his natural inclination and his supernatural vocation. The cultural symbiosis that he has forged between Americanism and Judaism is precarious. There is no need to document this. Will Herberg and others have exhibited how tenuous is the adjustment, how narrow the ridge he walks, how yawning the abyss. The natural man dominates; the supernatural vocation is suppressed.

The medieval confrontation of Judaism and Christianity is singularly unbecoming our time. It came to pass under conditions of the most grotesque and contrived caricature. Characteristic of both Catholic and Protestant images of the Jew was the conviction of his living death. The Jew, having died with the advent of Christianity, must be either ghost or devil to survive so persistently. It never crossed the consciousness of Christian theology that the survival and, what is more, the continued development of Judaism had providential significance for the Jew in opposition to Christianity.

The role which Christianity can perform in the face of contemporary Judaism is to revive the tradition of *adversus judaeos*. As I have tried to indicate, there is considerable basis and motivation for the relocation of religious polemics in our day: if Christianity is true it must be urged in the face of Judaism. It cannot, however, be urged as it was in days past. The triumph of Christianity over Judaism in the Middle Ages was a triumph *faute de mieux*. The Jew was the victim to be treated as Christendom chose—one day succored with kindness, the next day thrown to the flames.

Were this possible in our day—and the secular state has not made this completely impossible—it would accomplish as little now as it did then. The classic form of *adversus judaeos* was unhistorical, because it did not recognize the fact that it opposed only a construction, a theological abstraction. How many were the works of Christian apologetics written without the vaguest knowledge of Jews or Judaism, fabricated, without historical qualification, out of the ancient and questionable polemics of the Gospels. The Jew was little addressed. As the literature indicates, many such apologetic works were written to comfort some unlettered divine who was

suffering at the hands of a more skilled Jewish dialectician.

The new form of *adversus judaeos* must meet the crucial question of the Jew: what is the evidence of the world's redemption? Construe evidence as broadly as one will—whether it be the evidence of history or the evidence of the spirit—the Jew remains outside Christianity in the conviction that the redemption of the world is a chimera, that what it promises, it does not fulfill.

At this moment of history, religion has been singularly unproductive. Every meeting that I have attended of religious people seeking to articulate bases of common action in a thermonuclear age reduces itself to self-congratulatory platitudes. (I must, in conscience, exclude the seminars of The Church Peace Union, which are remarkably sophisticated, productive, and imaginative.) What becomes clear is that the reach of constructive theology falls short of contemporary events.

Protestantism tends to talk of peace either in terms that would frighten the most ardent Machiavellian or else replays the record of World War I pacifism; Roman Catholicism strikes me as moving in an atmosphere of moral casuistry—beautifully statistical and well-balanced, but utterly remote. Protestantism tends either toward the moral realism of Niebuhr or sentimental pacifism, while Roman Catholicism tends toward an arid rationalism.

The contribution of a revised *adversus judaeos*, or as this is, a *contra christianos*, to the crises of modern history would lie in the relatively unexplored territory of contemporary statecraft and political theory. There is a prevailing tendency to leave problems of political theory to the experts, whether such experts be professional scholars or professional statesmen. The assumption on which we operate, as Henry Kissinger has observed, is that politics is so totally adventitious that its theory can no longer be articulated.

This assumption demands that human beings trust the prudence of politicians. Having no choice, no control, no principles in terms of which to charge politics with obligations, we abdicate. Needless to say, the willingness to repose confidence in experts creates the preconditions of the authoritarian state. It is evident that the moment the people debar their own intelligence and judgment from competency, they have granted the pretensions of the state to omnipotence and wisdom. We need not delude ourselves, the state—whether democratic or totalitarian by law—will always accept the mantle of omniscience and superior competence. At the lowest level it makes life easier for the state to operate without criticism.

It is also a dangerous temptation to carry the egregious burden of statesmanship from simple paternalism to tyranny.

The contention of the Jew in the face of contemporary history is to mistrust its solutions and, in considerable measure, to charge Christianity anew with the burden of proof. If the culture of the West is Christian—as Christopher Dawson, Martin D'Arcy and other distinguished Catholic theologians assert—there is need to show forth the fabric of that Christianity. If history, however, is shot through with the demonic—as Bultmann, Tillich, and Niebuhr would argue—it must be shown in what sense Christianity functions in the world at all.

If, as the Jew says, history is unfulfilled, and creation is yet open before the end, the Jew has an obligation, perhaps more profound even than that of the Christian, to join issue with history, to ready it for the end. The mere fact that the Jew has no investment in the historical order places upon him, more profoundly, the burden of shaping it.

In essence, my own position is that Jewish messianism does not depend upon the reformation of the temporal order, the transformation of man through extraordinary, but fundamentally terrestrial, means. The crude materialism of early Jewish messianism has been and will continually be purged. It is only the community that can hope to affect society and the state, only the community, preoccupied with the *facta bruta*, not the dialectical abstractions of the human situation, that can hope to affect the total order of power. The community—the family, the religious fellowship, the labor union, to take random examples—alone can hope to restructure primary human relations and ultimately affect the exercise of power.

In the last analysis, however, only the passion of man to seek God and know Him can supply any abiding source of strength wherewith to alter the demonic use of power in history. The turning of history to Him who transcends it comes only by the effort to rethink the foundations on which history and power are based.

Christianity is characterized by hope. Judaism is characterized by trust. The hope that what is believed has come to pass and will be justified is Christian hope. The trust that what is not yet, but is yet readied, will come to pass is Jewish trust. The joining of a fulfilled hope and an unfulfilled trust, in mutual encounter with the obduracy of man and the unyielding order of history, is still to be tried. At this juncture, no advent of community, no opportunity for fresh discovery, can be turned aside either by the Christian or the Jew.