

The Catholics are now the Real Jews

The above title will strike the ear strangely. In the first place, the Jews are not one of the popular sections so that it may be surprising if we align them and claim an inheritance in their name. Obviously such an attitude on our part must denote a deep interest in them, reaching even towards affection. This is a strong word, but it should be our feeling if we reflect that they are the very kit and kin of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

But in the second place, what would be the purpose in Catholics claiming a name which to most minds has the dense of oppositeness to Catholicism? Accordingly the exploring of the idea will be intriguing.

The Jews are the most venerable people of whom we have any practical knowledge. They are 'at the beginning of our ways,' that is of the Christian religion. But the Jews are a race whereas Christians are not a race but contain all races as is proper for a religion which set out with that stated aim.

The Jews have represented in every way a different proposition. Their first emergence was as a race. Their human and divine programme preserved that as a principle. They grew as a people. Mixture with other races was a contamination against which they reacted strongly. Even in its very earliest forms – that is in Egypt where the Jewish people first took shape – they maintained their identity. It is impossible to believe that there were not friendly relations between them and the poorer Egyptians with whom they would be thrown into contact. But that does not appear to have led to any intermixture. Legend says that some of the Egyptians participated in the ceremony of sprinkling the transoms of their doors with the blood of the Paschal Lamb, an act of faith which the angel of the Lord honoured by sparing those households just as if they belonged. But we do not hear of any of those persons accompanying the Jews when they went forth. There was a cleavage between the two peoples.

When the Jews had recognised their role as the chosen people, that separateness hardened. The prescriptions of the Old Testament on that subject were peremptory. During their great captivities when the nation was either in whole or in large part transported to other lands, the supreme purpose was the saving of their members from absorption. One sees this at work in the Book of Tobias. He used his privileged position of being able to travel through Assyria to sustain his compatriots from being drawn away.

There is nothing in the Old Testament to suggest that the Jews were to regard conversion as an aim. In practice converts were accepted with doubt and jealous care as if they were not really desired; and in adopting the religion they were adopting the race. In one worthy author I read

that the Jews made very many converts during the Roman dispensation, but if so it would not be a feature of their general history. The unique position of the Jews as the Chosen People moving towards its providential mission of bringing forth the Messiah was the supreme idea. They must be ever faithful to their heritage and to the minutest teachings of the Divine Books. That was their gospel.

The times when they weakened in regard to those principles and had truck with foreigners, intermarriage and pagan practices, were viewed as periods of abomination automatically attracting the punishment of Heaven which restored the people to the straight path.

All this is inevitable in a people which regarded itself as 'Chosen' and as the custodian of a divine hope. Separateness is the first consideration. Outside elements are necessarily looked at askance as dangerous.

All that grew into a tradition which proved unbreakable even when the circumstances which produced it had totally changed. The exodus into many countries did not affect their attitude. In each new place of residence where (unlike the captivities of old) they took root in the new soil and became citizens, they still strove to preserve their individuality. In many places a dislike of them helped to do this.

But even in the United States of America today, where they are an influential body and where no hostility to them exists and where their religious practice has become so seriously impaired, nevertheless they preserve their Jewish identity. They have not been absorbed into the nation in the manner that the other races have. Much the same would apply in other countries.

The establishment of Israel has been a capital event in their history. While they have lost as a religion, they

have regained in theory their physical fatherland. For nearly 2,000 years they have survived as a people without a country. Now they have that country back again. That constitutes a notable difference in the position: the finalising of the change from religion to race, from chosen people to mere nationhood. For Israel does not manifest itself in any sense as a religion. It is purely a state; the fact that its people are all Jews does not alter that. Nor have the general body of the Jews of the world asserted themselves against that position as they would if they really regarded themselves as a religion and therefore viewed Israel as having betrayed the faith. No, they seem in the main to acquiesce as if Israel fairly typifies them.

Presumably the Jews exiled after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 would only have seen in that happening another of their evictions from Judea which the future would not be long reversing. But in actuality it was unique and it is mystifying that the Jews have not in the course of nineteen centuries been able to see it so.

In that period they have never had another prophet, whereas they had risen up almost in processional order during the fifteen hundred years from Moses to John the Baptist, each one supplying another feature to the picture of the Messiah. Surely the prophetic line should have continued if the Chosen People was still on its way of expectation? Nor has there been an additional book added to the Old Testament. And the Great Sacrifice terminated never to be renewed.

After all the previous exiles the Old Testament continued to be written; it took those unhappy intervals in its stride, describing them as ministering to the destiny of the people. The authentic transmission of the Divine Message was resumed, pointing in growing detail to the

culmination of that destiny, that is the Messiah who would fulfil all the prophecies and usher in a new order which would concern all men and supersede national divisions.

Not many of the Jews would deduce the full scope of this programme. But surely some of the intelligent students of the scriptures would discern that universal aspect and would be to some extent puzzled by it having regard to their notions of one Chosen People and national segregation? They had so long thought in terms of race and religion intertwined that the idea that the idea of a people which would harbour all nations would be a difficulty.

The conforming of Jesus to the clearly foretold lineaments of the Messiah, followed by the collapse of the system which rejected him, was enough evidence for those who then became Christians and for much of mankind since, but not for the Jews even though the career of Christianity has demonstrated its power as against all other forms of belief.

May I digress here to emphasise that superiority. Christianity appeals both to the simple and to the wise. Through the ages it has shown its capacity not only to keep abreast of every development of philosophy, art, and science, but to act as the instructor and moderator of each new wave of revolutionary thought. It is the teaching of the Messiah which has moulded the successive generations – even though each new one tends to deride its teacher. Though it does not appreciate it, the modern world owes to Christianity every worthy institution which it possesses.

Alone among the other religions, Islam has a dynamism which seems to rival Christianity. In Africa Islam is the

fastest-growing religion, but it could not hope to succeed against a fully competitive Christianity. Christianity can hope to convert Islam, but the latter could never hope to convert Christianity. Our own work in that continent proves our capacity to convert many of them without losing any ourselves.

It may sound unfashionably uneconomical but I have to say it; all those other religions are essentially primitive. They issued out of un-advanced conditions and grew among simple and superstitious people, and they could not hope to survive, still less to prevail, in the modern sophisticated, allegedly civilised, materialistic world.

Some might say that likewise Christianity emerged among simple people and would be subject to the same condemnation.

But Christianity throughout the course of its long life has had to contend with progressive, ultra-modern thought from the Roman Empire to today's empire of confused intellectualism, and it has proved itself beyond question to be in possession of a masterful philosophy and a noble system able to withstand the most up to date criticism. That would not apply to any other of the world's beliefs.

On a previous occasion I have told you of the Japanese governments' quest in the 1930s for the ideal religion. It finally decided to Christianise the country on the stated ground that of all forms of religion in the world, Christianity has the greatest influence over the minds of man and that on the whole that influence has been a beneficial one. It will be noted that this judgement does not declare that Christianity is the true religion but it does assert that it wields the greatest influence. This is just what we must expect in the religion which is truly from

God. That Japanese decision also declared that the other numerically great religions which had been carefully analysed by it, e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc., did not possess the philosophic substance to withstand the problems and materialisms of the day and therefore were foredoomed.

When the Chinese Communists came into power, they treated Christianity with respect but showed none towards the native religions which they trampled underfoot. Their subsequent efforts to adopt Christianity but to make it a state system are part of legionary history.

When Kemal Ataturk proposed to restore Turkey to first-class nationhood, he considered that Islam was an obstacle in the way; that its tenets were incompatible with progressive thought and national progress.

Surely the more enlightened leaders of the nations are able to see the same? Soon all the peoples of the world will be subject to the play of clever materialistic thought which will destroy whatever religion is unsubstantial, leaving their peoples defenceless against human weakness and wickedness. But if they want the substantial, they will find it in Christianity alone. The choices are: materialism or religion, Christianity or agnosticism.

The fact is that despite every type of criticism and of every conceivable impediment, Christianity has advanced from its first moments and is destined to have a fresh and immense reaping in the New World which will be born out of the present turmoil.

Where do the Jews stand in this religious panorama? I have suggested that for a while they could have regarded the event which changed the calendar from BC to AD as akin to their previous major calamities. But at some stage or another it had to become evident to the wiser ones that

there was a difference; one so great as to denote a final parting of the way.

The whole idea of the Old Testament was a convergence towards a superb culmination: a certain person would come who would expiate the sins of his people by suffering death for them. Moreover that person, who obviously would have to be of merely human stature, would inaugurate a new and supremely glorious era, one transcending anything in the past. Any watering down of this central idea would truly represent a disproportion, an anti-climax, a ghastly disillusion. It would deprive the Old Testament of its soul.

If the Old Testament did not continue itself in the New Testament, then it had suddenly become in fact the pathetic history book of a people who had lost their country and been scattered over the face of the earth. It is no longer the catechism of the Chosen People who were to be visibly transformed into the light of the world. The spirit had fled from the book. It had become little more than a collection of national traditions and usages. It had turned itself into a Jewish analogy to the Book of Confucius.

The rejection of Jesus would mean that the Messiah had not come at the time specified by the prophets. The time schedule had not operated. The promised programme of religious and national exaltation was 'not yet'. There was a mistake somewhere!

Some would go on hoping that it was no more than a miscalculation of time, perhaps as much as a century or so. And indeed we see that in AD 132 a great majority of the Jews eagerly exclaimed Bar Kokhba as the Messiah and under him threw themselves into another disastrous war with the Romans. Bar Kokhba was not the Messiah. The

Jews had refused the *truth*, so they were made victims of the *false*.

As time went on bringing out the inconsistencies more clearly, the correct conclusion must force itself on acute minds and then on a gradual and indistinct way on all. The religious programme of the Old Testament had not worked out for them as expected. They were not the Chosen People in any real sense, but only one among others; a people which had had its day and was now in eclipse.

What would have been the effect on the Jewish people of this total disenchantment? What sort of reorientation of minds would take place? Unquestionably the Old Testament would largely lose its divine character and take on a merely national and cultural aspect. Would this logically mean that they had lost their religion?

It would be a daring thing to suggest that all this amounted to a shipwreck of faith. But definitely something distressingly like that would have to happen. The psychological laceration was so extreme as to admit of no other consummation. The extinction of the great vision and its substitution by a different mode of thought altogether would be a devastation. The Messiah and his mother are reduced to a symbolism pointing to what? The Old Testament ceased to expand. The prophets, the priests, the sacrifice are gone, and what is left is so deprived of necessary support and true meaning that it dwindles to no more than mere conventions. There is no semblance between that empty shell and the old Jewish religion which has transfigured itself into Christianity.

The Jews remain very distinctly a race. The passage of two thousand years and their acclimatisation in many countries have not affected that. It is a real phenomenon,

unique in the annals of mankind and explainable. I think, only in the light of the Christian belief that they will be converted as a race before the end of the world.

But now their religious position is anomalous. It is alleged by those who have sought to study the question impartially and systematically that the Jewish attitude towards God is dubious. Only a minority believes and complies with the rules of the Old Testament and of these a proportion would regard those observances as no more than the usages of their race.

Our conception of the Messiah seems to be extinct among them; that is a person who would come in the manner that Jesus did, to expiate sin and create a new spiritual order such as is definitely to be found in Christianity. Their gaze seems to be limited to a territorial restoration of their nation. They have got back their homeland in Israel, but few of them wish to return to it. Its ultimate scope is circumscribed; there cannot be a meaningful future before it

Even supposing that they had in mind the resumption of the destiny of the Chosen People from its point of interruption nineteen centuries ago, no step has been taken in regard to the restoration of the focus-point of their ancient religious observance, the daily sacrifice in the Temple. Everything in their faith gravitated towards that centre. Yet they have not sought to resume that sacrifice nor to rebuild the Temple which housed it – even though they now have possession of all Jerusalem. It is quite certain, I think, that they have no intention of renewing the Temple or the sacrifice. In that connection the stupendous historic event of AD 363 assuredly remains in their mind; that is the attempt of the Roman Emperor Julian to rebuild the Temple on the original site. He did

this as a counterblast against the Christians, but in every sense it blew up in his face.

More than some people declare that the new Israel is a materialistic and atheistic state, and that it has no higher conception of itself than that. This sounds shocking and if it were partially true it would mark the abandonment by them of everything that we Catholics understand about the Chosen People and its history.

It would mean that they have cast off their destiny and that we have put it on; that we read their sacred book with comprehension whereas it is veiled to them, and that their patriarchs and prophets, whom we reverence as our spiritual ancestors, are to them only historical figures.

But of course it is easy for us to be wise after the event; we have received the New Testament which continues the Old Testament and furnishes the key to it: which brings us to the contention advanced in our title.

The Chosen People was two things in one. It was a nation and it was a religion. The two were divinely interwoven and the people did not distinguish between them; it was a real national image of the body and the soul. The people looked on the nation somewhat as we do the Mystical Body. They were well versed in their religion and history through the teaching of the rabbis. Every place had its synagogue with its Sabbath service. Only at Jerusalem was the Temple with its daily sacrifice which looked back on their earliest duty of sacrifice to God and at the same time looked forward to the expiatory death of the Lamb of God, the Messiah. That sacrifice brought Calvary into the lives of the people, as the Mass in a higher form brings Calvary into our lives.

The reading of the Old Testament shows how every event alike of the individual and corporate life was related

to God as a drastically direct way. If either the nation or the person did good, they received a worldly reward for it; and punishment if they did wrong. God was there encouraging them and checking them in intangible forms, just like a human parent. The nation was being continuously moulded towards an ultimate exaltation of a completely special character, something not at all in line with an ordinary national deliverance of which the Chosen People had many recurring experiences. Disasters were being used to shape the people towards that supreme development, and every now and then a prophet arose to give supplementary detail. Therefore the Messiah, the maker of the new era, was not to be in the ordinary succession of liberators and national leaders. He was over and above them, and his mission was not to be confounded with theirs.

Of course many of the Jews underestimated the Messiah and imagined him as no more than a national superman. But so many of us underestimate God and attach crude ideas to him. We can be sure that the spiritual Jews estimated that expected one more correctly and realised that he would be in an order of his own, far superior to the heroic line which had reached Israel from dire emergencies, such as Moses, David, Judas Maccabaeus. Indeed why should these great personages be looking forward longingly to the Messiah who would only be of their calibre? Note particularly those prophetic words of David: 'The Lord said to my Lord: sit thou at my right hand (Ps 110)' – which would befit an address by the Eternal Father to his own Son.

That is the inner substance of the Old Testament, to which everything else ministers. That was what the Doctors of the Law taught. Through the priests and the

rabbis, who were the local teachers, it was passed on to the people in detail so that it was familiar to all and accepted as the idealism of the nations. It would be part of the texture of life; the people would talk familiarly on the subject and would speculate in regard to it.

Let us try to imagine then the realisation which must eventually have dawned on the more discerning ones that the destruction by the Romans and the dispersion of the people was no mere period of chastisement but an irremediable catastrophe. This must surely have induced in many the reflection that perhaps the Christians were right: the Messiah had come as promised and had fulfilled the prophecies; that he was indeed the Lamb of God and by the sacrifice in the Temple, and that as a people they had rejected him! They had plunged into the abyss and the Redeemer had turned to those outside the fold for belief and gratitude. In the Gentiles he had found his true brethren; they were the heirs of the promise; in them would the chosen people continue its life. To some of the Jews at last that realisation came with force, as witness the many who subsequently became Christians.

The Christians, the new People of God, are the real Jews. They perpetuate the line with all the air and every sign of proprietorship. They know themselves to be the children of the Woman of Genesis, the brethren of her beloved son who redeemed them. The Old Testament is their book in a higher degree than it belonged to the Jews, for they understand it better even than the ancient Jews who could not appreciate how minutely it was delineating the future. The present-day Jews can have no supernatural comprehension of the Old Testament. That could only come through the New Testament which is the superstructure and prolongation of the Old Testament.

Refusal of the *new* leaves the *old* a mystery. What does the devout modern Jew make of the Old Testament?

The Christian sees no mystery but only the divine plan of salvation unfolding itself in orderly sequence from the moment that Redemption was required, that is from the Fall. For the person who is willing to believe, the details are all filled in; the gradual approach to the peak of Redemption is as reasonably marked with the signposts of logic and prophecy as is the ordinary road. Redemption wrought, that logical road resumes for the Christian but not for the Jew, for whom it has abruptly terminated in an illogical nothingness. It is like the serial story of which the last and vital instalment fails to appear.

The *New Law* does not entail a repudiation of the *Old Law* any more than a completion spurns the preparation, or a house rejects its foundations. The New Testament is the expansion and key of the Old Testament; it stands on it and requires it. The Catholic Church exalts it as the Word of God, and claims the right to interpret it. And where outside the Church is there any authority for believing that it is the Word of God at all?

The Patriarchs of the Old Law are our spiritual ancestors; its heroes are our heroes. The psalms are the daily prayer of the Church. The Breviary uses the Bible without distinction as to Old and New Testament. Likewise does the Missal which buttresses the central event of the renewal of Calvary with readings from the Old and New. As I have already said, the Mass carries on from Calvary, being the Divine expedient for diffusing that sacrifice among all who have lived since then; just as the sacrifice of the Old Law was God's way of reflecting the grace of Calvary back into the souls of those before its time.

As Christians we absorb and complete the old law and its idealism. In the mind of God, the real Jews were formerly those who lived in expectation of the coming of Christ. The real Jews now are those who have turned that expectation into acceptance. The mere ties of the flesh do not avail. The Catholic People of God, the Mystical Body, continues the march of the older Chosen People towards the higher Promised Land. We are the real Jews today.

As I began with the mention of the Woman of Genesis, perhaps I should in legionary fashion end on the same note. In the days before Our Lord came, it was the secret ambition of every pious maiden that she might be the mother of the Messiah. For the ancient prophesy declared that he who would reverse the Fall would be born of a woman. But what place can that thought have today in the mind of any Jewish girl? None, because the Jews have long since abandoned the hope of a person who would redeem his people from the effects of the Fall. Still less would there be advertence to his mother. To the extent that the modern Jew would think at all of that prophesy and that hope, it would only be as a cryptic symbolism.

I sum it up. The world turned upside down for Judaism when their greatest son Jesus died. After that day of fulfilment of the prophecies, the true Jewish religion emptied itself into Christianity. The Christians eagerly accepted the Old Testament and the other treasures of Judaism. They believed in the man Jesus, the Messiah and Redeemer, and in the woman who bore him.

But what is in the mind of the orthodox Jews today? To what goal are they tending? What is their ambition? When they read the Old Testament, what authority do they attach to it and what do they read into it?

What does Judaism exist for today? What is its message and what is its purpose? It does not seem to deliver any message recognisable by us; and in that case it is not easy to see what is its purpose. It can hardly be said to live on its past, because its past – deprived of the Christian culmination – would appear to be without religious significance; just the history of a people which had its moments of greatness long ago and then faded out as a nation.

But definitely there is a difference between it and the other religions with a great past. Until recently the Jews had no soil of their own and therefore did not seem to possess a basis even for nationhood. But it has survived as a people and it has asserted wide influence and produced grand figures. Nevertheless it stands as a people without a purpose. We can give it that purpose by drawing it into the Church. We are indebted to them for the heritage which they received from God and handed on to us. We can repay by reintroducing them to that heritage. Recent trends in America have suggested that it is by no means the fantastic proposition which at first sight it might appear to be.