

*The Jews in the
“New Middle Ages”:
Jacques Maritain’s
Anti-Semitism in Its Times*

John Hellman

There are good reasons to say simply that Jacques Maritain was—at least for the earlier part of his career—an anti-Semite. While his imprecations in those years against the Jews might have seemed relatively dispassionate, reasoned, and moderate when set against those of some of his more virulent contemporaries, they were central in his social, political, and religious thinking.

Powerful, articulate, extremist anti-Semitism existed among French Catholics at the time of the Dreyfus case; it was echoed in the writings of Léon Bloy, in the Maritains’ dramatic conversion, and in Jacques’s distinctive position on the Jewish problem in the 1920s. French anti-Jewish feeling was exacerbated during the crises of the 1930s and helps explain what happened to the Jews in Vichy, France, after Pétain’s proclamation of a National Revolution in 1940.

Vociferous anti-Semitism was a mainstream characteristic of French Catholic publications in the twenty-year period preceding the conversion of the young Jacques Maritain, his wife Raïssa Oumançoff, and

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her sister, Vera, to the Church in 1906. “The father of modern French anti-Semitism” Edouard Drumont, published his immensely popular *La France Juive* in 1886 and, with his newspaper *La Libre Parole*, forcefully portrayed a decisive struggle in his country between the Catholics and the Jews.¹ This was a time when the number of Jews in French urban centers was increasing in geometric proportions.² Drumont’s anti-Semitism was mystically Catholic, racist . . . and aggressively anti-capitalist and populist in its attacks on “money people.”³ Perhaps “anti-Semitism was the socialism of the Catholics at the end of the nineteenth century.”⁴ In any case, Drumont’s views were given wide circulation and legitimization by mainstream Catholic publications such as “*La Bonne Presse*”: their prominent daily *La Croix* was proud to call itself “the most anti-Semitic paper in France,” claiming that “from Golgotha to today, the cry is always the same, the Jews are the enemy of Christ and Christians.” While the militantly reactionary press—*La Croix*, *L’Univers*, etc.—were consistently against the Jews, so too were Christian Democratic publications (*Le Peuple Français*, *La Voix de la France*, *La Terre de France*, etc.). In fact, anti-Semitism—often fuelled by perceived Jewish influence in the financial, political and educational systems—was general, not marginal, among the organs of French Catholic opinion, moderate or radical, in the period from the Dreyfus case until the late 1930s, as it combined new anti-capitalist hatred for the Jews with traditionalist Catholic disdain.

Jacques and Raïssa Maritain were converted to the Catholic Church by a mystical and militantly anti-Semitic writer in the person of Léon Bloy, and it was Bloy’s most vitriolic anti-Semitic diatribe, *Le Salut par les Juifs*, which Maritain saw as his *chef d’oeuvre*.⁵ So taken were the Maritains with that book that they immediately wrote its author, and had the famous, dramatic encounter that changed their lives.⁶ In a

¹Drumont also played a role in exposing graft and extortion during the Panama Canal scandal in 1892, but his popular influence then declined as the young Charles Maurras and his *Action Française* began to attract militant younger nationalists of Georges Bernanos’s stripe.

²Jean-Yves Moller, “*La Vérité sur les juifs de France au XIXe siècle*,” *L’Histoire*, no. 148 (October 1991), 32.

³See John Hellman, “Bernanos, Drumont, and the Rise of French Fascism,” *The Review of Politics*, vol. 52, no. 3 (Summer 1990), 441–59.

⁴Michel Winock, *Edouard Drumont* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 193.

⁵With Bloy’s earlier work, *La Femme pauvre*. See Jacques Maritain, “*Quelques pages sur Léon Bloy*,” *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (1927), 40.

⁶The memorable passage in Raïssa Maritain’s memoirs describing the dramatic encounter with Bloy was in fact a quotation from a composition written by Jacques, and dated 1927—a

matter of months, and at their own expense, as an homage to Bloy, the Maritains had a special new and deluxe edition of *Les Juifs* printed by the old master printer Payen, who had taught typography to their friend Charles Péguy. Bloy had it dedicated to his recently converted goddaughter Raïssa "for the Catholic glory of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."⁷

The Anti-Semitism of Bloy

Léon Bloy surfaced as one of the most extreme and vociferous anti-Semites of turn-of-the-century France.⁸ He attacked the high profile of the Jews in that loathsome, materialistic, and money-grubbing world in which he passed as a stranger, as an "ungrateful beggar" living off the donations of friends and acquaintances.⁹ Even Drumont was too money-minded, too much like the Jews, for Léon Bloy. Drumont, Bloy charged, was telling Catholics that "they [the Jews] have stolen from you, now you go and steal everything back from them."¹⁰

Bloy's differences with Drumont did not imply sympathy for Jews. "I ought," he declared, "to be little suspect of tender love for the present representatives of that famous race. Here is what I wrote six years ago in an angry book¹¹ . . . 'The Middle Ages . . . had the common sense to confine them to reserved pens and imposed special clothing which allowed everyone to avoid them.'¹² When one had to have something to do with those rotters, one subsequently purified oneself as fast as one could. . . . the Christian antidote to their pestilence. . . ." ¹³ Bloy found Christian society "stinking" due to that

period in which Jacques spoke at the dedication of the curious, heavy, even menacing, celtic cross erected as a monument to Bloy in the cemetery at Bourg-la-Reine.

Their first letter, Maritain recalled, had been received by Bloy on the feast of Saint Barnaby. The same day the next year (11 June 1906) Jacques Maritain and the Oumançoff sisters were baptized in the Church of Saint John the Evangelist. [*Quelques pages*," *ibid.*, 40, 47–49.]

⁷Léon Bloy, *Le Salut par les juifs* (Paris: 1906). This edition may be consulted in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris). It represents quite a change from the pulpy appearance of most of Bloy's shoestring-budget publications.

⁸This was how Bloy was characterized by the leading scholarly expert on modern French anti-Semitism, Pierre Birnbaum (conversation with the author, 16 December 1991). See also note 49 below.

⁹Such as the Maritains who began making regular contributions to him.

¹⁰Bloy, *Le Salut*, 6–7.

¹¹Léon Bloy, *Le Désespéré* (Édition Soirat), 201.

¹²Bloy, *Le Salut*, 13–14.

¹³*Ibid.*, 14.

“disgusting race” as both morally and physically the modern *Youtre* (Yid) was the magnet for all the hideousness of the world.¹⁴

On seeing the “Jewish market” in the city of Hamburg, Bloy had encountered three importunate Jewish merchants who had provoked overwhelming, profound physical revulsion: “everything which could disgust one with living was the business of those impure profiteers whose obsequious howling clings to me, sticks to me, is glued to me physically, inflicts a fantastic sort of illness on me. . . .”¹⁵ Yet beyond Hamburg, everywhere in the world, there were the marks of a cursed race: “all those faces of lucre . . . had the same trade mark . . . the irrevocable separation from other mortals . . . which makes them so profoundly identical in any region of the globe.”¹⁶ In the three Jews at Hamburg the self-styled prophet saw a symbol of the “moneyed people” of the modern world:

the black rags and the senile odour change absolutely nothing, . . . I saw . . . all of the contemporary millionaires, males or females, . . . pride of our perfumed synagogues, in the three aforesaid carcasses.¹⁷

Bloy described the historical role of the Jews as “blocking the way to raise the level” for gentiles. While Raïssa Maritain later read a sort of “mystical sympathy” for the Jews as part of God’s providential plan into this analogy, it is difficult to find more than unrelenting, unadulterated, racist loathing in Bloy’s words:

The history of the Jews blocks the history of humankind like a dam blocks a river, to raise the level. They are immobile forever and all one can do is to traverse them in jumping [over them] with more or less injury to oneself, but with no hope of demolishing them.

Have we not, Bloy mused, made a sufficient effort to deal with the Jewish problem? “The experience of sixty generations is irrefutable . . . the symbolic Vine of the Testament was indefatigably weeded of those venomous parasites . . . and that people became scattered in twenty peoples . . . its iron destiny consisting of simply not dying.”¹⁸

¹⁴Ibid., 15.

¹⁵Ibid., 17.

¹⁶Ibid., 17–18.

¹⁷Ibid., 30.

¹⁸Ibid., 30–31.

Raïssa Maritain later pardoned Bloy his harsher remarks about the Jews because "To this man . . . much will be forgiven because he loved much, and everything he thought . . . he was able to express with incomparable beauty."¹⁹ But there was no fraternal love lost for the Jews and not much beautiful language directed toward them in the book which had so attracted her. "Strictly speaking, I know that the Israelites can be called our 'brothers,'" Bloy wrote, "But to love them as *such* is a proposition revolting to nature. It is the miraculous overcharge of the most transcendent sanctity or the illusion of an imbecilic religiosity."²⁰ For Bloy: "Sympathy for the Jews is a sign of turpitude. . . . It is impossible to merit the esteem of a dog when one does not have an instinctive disgust for the Synagogue. That is [like] . . . an axiom of rectilinear geometry. . . ."²¹

Bloy expected the destruction of the modern world as in the prophecy confided to Mélanie by Notre Dame de la Salette. He foresaw the "turning inside out like a glove"²² of the Jews, of the world of lucre, of getting and spending. Money was "the blood of the poor," and the Jews, as they converted and held that money, had sucked up that blood. Like several mystical intellectuals of the twentieth century, including his godchildren, Léon Bloy envisaged a cataclysm followed by a sort of "New Middle Ages": "The Jews will not convert until Jesus will come down from his Cross, and precisely Jesus can not come down until they will be converted."²³

The Jews certainly should not be left to their own devices, Bloy thought, but neither should one give in to the crude, and demagogic, anti-Semitism of a Drumont because it makes no allowance for "all values being transformed as by an invisible switch," by the kind of experience that transformed Raïssa and Vera Oumançoff. For Bloy, with a very few odd exceptions, the only good Jew was a converted Jew.

¹⁹Raïssa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together and Adventures in Grace. The Memoirs of Raïssa Maritain*, trans. Julie Kernan (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1961), 102.

²⁰Bloy, *Le Salut*, 29. Ironically, Jacques Maritain himself would be accused of something just like this later by colleagues like Georges Bernanos who sneered about his "effeminate daydreams about the Jews" when Maritain, denouncing racialist anti-Semitism in the 1930s, spoke of the providential role of the converted Jews.

²¹Bloy, *Le Salut*, 41.

²²This is the metaphor that Jacques Maritain employed to describe his own conversion in his "Letter to Jean Cocteau."

²³Bloy, *Le Salut*, 93.

Jacques Maritain first publicly confronted the Jewish question in a major way in 1921, speaking “*À propos de la Question Juive*” during the *Semaine des Écrivains Catholiques*. While his ideas were not incompatible with Bloy’s vision, which the Maritains had published fourteen years earlier, they were put forward in far less inflammatory language, and subsequently printed in both the quasi-official *Documentation Catholique* (30 July–6 August 1921) and the prestigious Dominican review *La Vie spirituelle*.²⁴

At the outset of the essay, Maritain recognized the existence of a “Jewish problem”: “the mass of the Jewish people . . . remain separated, reserved, by virtue of the very providential decree which makes them, all through history, the witnesses of Golgotha.”²⁵ This historical and practical situation meant that “one should expect from the Jews something completely other than a real attachment to the common good of Western and Christian civilization.” Beyond that, the rejection of Christ by the Jews led them to misconceive and pervert their messianic hopes and “fatally play a subversive role in the world, . . . by reason of a metaphysical necessity, which makes of Messianic hope, and the passion for absolute justice, . . . the most active of revolutionary ferments. [Thus] . . . one finds Jews . . . at the origin of most of the great revolutionary movements of the modern period.”²⁶

The Jewish Mentalité

Arguing that there was a distinctive “Jewish mentality,” Maritain approvingly cited Maurice Muret’s *L’Esprit Juif, essai de psychologie ethnique*²⁷ on the Jewish intelligentsia:

The contemporary Jewish thinker is an ardent destructive agent. One searches in vain for a stable principle, a traditional idea, on which he has not exercised his will for destruction. . . . the function of contemporary Israelites boils down to the de-Christianization of the world.²⁸

²⁴Jacques Maritain, “*À propos de la Question Juive*,” *La Vie spirituelle. Ascétique et Mystique*, Tome 4, no. 22 (July 1921), 305–10.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 305.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 305–6.

²⁷Paris: Perrin, 1901. Muret was a respected academic who had published several volumes (in French) on non-French literatures.

²⁸Jacques Maritain, “*La Question Juive*,” 306.

As an "ethnic psychologist" Muret pretended to transcend polemics and to represent dispassionate objectivity. But having written essays on the "ethnic psychology" of several peoples, Muret could not refrain from making value judgements about:

that ferment of revolt which is always teeming in Israel, the renewal of that tendency among the emancipated Jews of the nineteenth century, and the powerful allies which the revolutionaries of the Western world find today among the heirs of the prophetic tradition.²⁹

Jacques Maritain, granting "the enormous role" played by Jewish financiers and by Zionists in the politics of the World War I, as well as in the peace arrangements, concluded with the "evident necessity" of a struggle against the secret Judeo-Masonic societies and the cosmopolitan financial power allied to them. While "a certain number of general defense measures" seemed in order, Maritain conceded that they would have been easier to initiate were civilization still officially Christian.

Maritain recommended seeking guidance in the work *Saint Thomas et la question Juive*³⁰ by Msgr. Simon Deploige, editor of the *Revue sociale catholique* and professor at the Université Catholique de Louvain, as well as in the social blueprint of the "social Catholic" Marquis de la Tour du Pin, *Vers un ordre social chrétien*.³¹ M. de la Tour du Pin's book was the more polemical: alluding to a Jewish conspiracy against Christian society he condemned the French Revolution's granting political rights to the Jews. Given their corrosive role in Christian society, the marquis thought that Jews should be considered as dangerous foreigners to whom citizenship status be refused. Deploige, for his part, brought the "necessary intellectual discipline" Maritain sought in discussions of the problem and also disassociated his position from the racism of Drumont; he buttressed his arguments with what he called the "religious and deductive" anti-Semitism in the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

The "New Middle Ages"

According to de la Tour du Pin, Saint Thomas's anti-Semitism became clear in the measures he recommended against Jews for the

²⁹*L'Esprit Juif*, 319.

³⁰Simon Deploige, *Saint Thomas et la question Juive* (Paris: Bloud & Barral, 1899).

³¹Marquis de la Tour du Pin Chambly de la Charce, *Vers un ordre social chrétien, jalons de route, 1882-1907* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1907).

protection of the religion of Catholics.³² For Deploige, this was considerably different from the anti-Semitism of Drumont for the anti-Semitism of Saint Thomas is religious and deductive” (not viscerally “racist”).³³ Saint Thomas and his contemporaries did not force the Jews to convert, to baptize their children, to abandon their religious practices, but they did prevent them and their subversive ideas from getting leverage on the “social body.”³⁴ Applying Saint Thomas’s thinking to the contemporary situation, Deploige concluded, rather more ominously, that the state should effect “legal confiscations” for citizens despoiled by the Jews (that is, property acquired by usurious practices).³⁵ Deploige also recommended the exclusion of Jews from “the direction of affairs,” from private *salons*, and from state administrative offices.³⁶

During the virulent anti-Semitism provoked by the Dreyfus case in France, Deploige recommended what he portrayed to be the reasonable and moderate Thomist approach—because, as he remarked rather darkly, things could get much worse for the Jews; one had to hope “more drastic solutions” could be avoided.³⁷ Msgr. Deploige disliked Drumont’s violent anti-Semitism, and so put forward a Thomist solution: tolerance within the limits of certain healthy exclusionary restrictions, a *numerus clausus* in certain areas, as part of a “New Middle Ages,” with restitution of “misappropriated” funds.³⁸

Maritain’s endorsement of this Deploige tract fifteen years after publishing Bloy’s *Le Salut par les Juifs* suggests that a form of anti-Semitism remained central after Maritain’s conversion and to his vision of a new Christian Order. Deploige’s kind of thinking helped establish an approach to “the Jewish question” among Catholic elites that would come into its own during the Vichy regime (even finding favor in its most humane and Catholic-oriented centers of reflection such as the École Nationale Supérieure des Cadres d’Uriage). This was hardly a liberal, democratic, or pluralistic position. But was Maritain—even as a *Christian Democrat*—ever truly “liberal” on the

³²Deploige, *La Question Juive*, 15–16.

³³*Ibid.*, 22–23.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 29.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 53.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 58.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 59–60.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 58–59.

Jewish question? At least before World War II? In the thinking of the Thomist anti-Semites, Christian society was to eschew vulgar racism while moving decisively against destructive forces of "modernity," of "money," of the "hatred of religion." Good Christians had to learn to limit, to exclude, even to confiscate, in order to avoid harsher, less humane, less acceptable, measures.

Maritain added to le Tour du Pin or Deploige, arguing that because Zionism had created a Jewish state in Palestine, Jews should renounce the Zionist project, or go reside in Palestine, or, failing the two, remain in other countries as foreigners.³⁹ What pretended to be reasonable, balanced conclusions terminated Maritain's analysis:

1. If the measures requiring governmental authority need the support of public opinion, "we Catholic writers have the duty . . . to clarify the latter . . . to reason things through without hatred, retaining the necessary intellectual discipline. Popular passions and pogroms have never resolved any question, on the contrary."

2. "The Jew must not appear as the *unique* cause of the evils which we are suffering. . . . there are other guilty parties, . . . it would be really too easy for us to beat our fist on the breast of Israel, forgetting that the faults . . . of Christians hold the first rank among causes."

Visceral racism was to be rejected for a more enlightened and balanced approach: "If he can be an anti-Semite from other points of view, a Catholic writer ought to keep his faith from all hatred and all contempt for the Jewish race and the religion of Israel. . . ." ⁴⁰ The basic distinction had to be kept in mind: "However degenerate carnal Jews may be, the race of the prophets, of the Virgin and the apostles, the race of Jesus is the trunk on which we are grafted."⁴¹

The Oumançoff sisters and Jacques Maritain converted to the apocalyptic, revolutionary world prophesied by Léon Bloy and suggested by the messages Mélanie received at La Salette, in which "Jewish" society

³⁹Jacques Maritain, "La Question Juive," 306. This approach to the Zionist issue was picked up by militant Catholic nationalists in Quebec during the 1930s and, citing Maritain, advocated in their publications such as the newspaper *Le Devoir*. On this matter see the excellent unpublished (and as yet unaccepted) Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Université Laval in 1990: Esther Delisle. *Antisémitisme et nationalisme d'extrême droite dans la province de Québec 1929-1939*.

⁴⁰Maritain referred to the Epistle to the Romans 11, and to Saint Augustine's *Adversus Judaeos*, chap. 10 ("He appended a long quotation affirming love of the Jews . . . and appealing to the Jews to convert").

⁴¹Jacques Maritain, "La Question Juive," 307.

would be completely inverted by the pure, French, Christian one. The new order would be inspired by disinterested knight-monks like the Maritains' great friend, Renan's grandson, Ernest Psichari. At this time Maritain held up Psichari as someone "apt to focus in his person all the fire which was smouldering in the soul of his generation. . . . The grandfather left in the shadows of human science and the discussions of philosophers and scholars, the grandson came back through the supernatural light which the Holy Spirit dispenses."⁴²

Maritain insisted on Catholics keeping a sense of proportion about the "divine drama" that the case of the Jews evoked: it would be absurd for Catholic writers "to speak of the Jewish race and of the Old Testament, of Abraham and Moses, in the same tone as did Voltaire."⁴³ He enumerated the "impressive number of Jews who . . . have been converting to Catholicism" as well as the amount of prayer being devoted to them—and the series of miracles that have seemed to result.⁴⁴

It was on this high note of potential mass conversion that Maritain concluded his remarks on the Jews. While "the sort of sacred horror" that the Church retains for the *perfidie* (wickedness) of the Jews prevents her from kneeling when she prays for them on Good Friday, she repeats the great cry *Pater, dimitte illis* of Jesus crucified. So while Catholics had to fight "the depraved Jews who, with apostate Christians, are leading the anti-Christian revolution" they also had to avoid "closing the gates of heaven to those souls of good will, to those *true Israelites* of whom Our lord spoke, *in quibus dolus non est.*"⁴⁵ Like Bloy, then, Maritain saw the good—even world-historical—Jew as the convert.

World War II and After

Two decades of political and economic crisis followed Jacques Maritain's position on the "Jewish question" in the early 1920s, and they culminated with the measures taken against the Jews by the Vichy

⁴²Jacques Maritain, "Préface" (22 August 1921), to A.-M. Goichon, *Ernest Psichari* (Paris: Éditions de la "Revue des jeunes," 1921), 12, 15. Psichari was presented as the antithesis of the secular rational mentality. He knew well, Maritain commented, that to adhere to the Catholic *Credo* reason alone, even the most vigorous and enlightened, is essentially insufficient" (*ibid.*, 17).

⁴³Jacques Maritain, "La Question Juive," 308.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 308–9.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 310.

government in 1940. By 1940 anti-Semitism had become a powerful force in France but there remained important differences in the anti-Semitism of the various groups. When Maritain, in 1921, had described a Jewish problem rooted in an innate tendency toward subversion and recommended a policy abrogating equal rights, imposing restrictions and controls, he had been advocating what was, in the Catholic world, a relatively moderate position. Following Maritain's lead, Christians of relatively democratic and liberal bent rejected racialist anti-Semitism as un-Christian, while nevertheless allowing for the existence of a "Jewish problem" in France that had to be faced.

The Maritains' friend Georges Bernanos reinforced extremist Catholic anti-Semitism with his widely read *La Grande peur des bien-pensants* in 1931, celebrating the original genius and power of his "old master" Drumont, and Drumont's "magical book" *La France Juive*. Bernanos even equalled that "visionary historian" Drumont in his denunciations of the Jewish race that had taken control of Christian France. The election of the Popular Front government of the Jewish Socialist Léon Blum in 1936 exacerbated tensions, but a number of well-known Catholics sharing certain anti-fascist Popular Front goals, broke the unity of what might otherwise have seemed a Catholic right-wing bloc.

In this volatile situation many of the more liberal and democratic Catholics continued to denounce "racist anti-Semitism," but, for many of them, "Christianity" was more important than "democracy," and the ideal society would be more "Christian" than liberal. Thus many of the more open-minded Catholics were prepared to *tolerate* the Jews as a community (especially when they were believing, God-fearing—non "carnal"—Jews) if not to accept them completely as equals. Many Catholics seemed to be able to accept the general line that Maritain had set out in the early 1920s: that restrictive governmental action was necessary to meet the "Jewish problem"; a *numerus clausus* might well be introduced where necessary and feasible.

When Jacques Maritain again spoke out on the situation of the Jews in the later 1930s it was still in the perspective of prospective conversion. "The Jews chose the world . . . their problem is to be held by their choice. Prisoners and victims of that world they love; of which they . . . can never be."⁴⁶ Assimilated German Jews, Maritain

⁴⁶H. Daniel-Rops, ed., "*L'Impossible antisémitisme*," *Les Juifs* (Paris: Plon, 1937).

sardonically noted, had become “quite well reconciled with the Prince of this World,” and that they were “The Jews who became like the others.” Maritain called for a pluralist and personalist society in which diverse spiritual families would have differing ethnico-juridical statuses, but, in becoming a Catholic or a Protestant, a Jew would leave the Jewish spiritual family and become “a fulfilled Israelite.” The irreligious or “bad” Jew on the other hand, since the people of Israel are still a priestly people, should be considered “a sort of bad priest.” One had always to recall that Jesus comes from Jewish parents as does much of the Catholic liturgy: hence “the enormity of the outrage and of the blasphemy” of abusing the Jewish race.⁴⁷ Maritain did not really repudiate his earlier positions here: he alluded to the new rights given Jews by the French Revolution that it would be unjust to take away, but he also reiterated “Liberalism’s” failures, and again warned about “assimilated” Jews.⁴⁸

In the late 1930s prominent progressive Catholics who had joined Maritain in anti-Fascist causes took positions on the Jews not so different from that which Maritain had set out in 1921. The *chrétiens rouges*, François Mauriac and Emmanuel Mounier, while condemning the abusive, racist anti-Semitism of the period, both recognized the existence of a potential, or actual, Jewish problem and toyed with the idea that restrictive governmental measures against the Jews might be the only remedy.⁴⁹ Maritain’s great friend Stanislas Fumet, in

⁴⁷Ibid., 63, 68, 71.

⁴⁸While the volume in which Maritain published this essay had a variety of opinions on the Jews, its tone was not exactly conciliatory, toward them. In a letter introducing the volume, Paul Claudel wrote to Daniel-Rops:

It is a fact that one sees Jews everywhere in the first rank of the parties of social or religious subversion. Perhaps, moreover, they are obeying a sort of providential vocation in this destructive role. But it is not surprising that it provokes reactions. [*Les Juifs*, vii.]

⁴⁹Mauriac’s ambiguous April 1937 letter of adherence to *La Juste Parole* (an organization formed to combat anti-Semitism in the name of Catholicism) is reproduced in Pierre Birnbaum’s valuable *Un mythe politique: “la république Juive”* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 245. Mauriac’s son Claude (who would become General de Gaulle’s secretary) advocated “tact and sensitivity” on the part of Jews to avoid the necessity of imposing a “*numerus clausus*” in certain areas. (“*Réponse à B. Lecache*,” *La Flèche*, 28 October 1938), cited in *ibid.*, 247.

Mounier’s long, ambiguous remarks—warning about “curing the plague by introducing cholera”—were published in *Le Voltigeur français* (1 March 1939) and are cited at length in *ibid.*, 248–50.

Temps Présent (9 September 1938), argued that of course one had to condemn:

racism in the name of Catholicism. . . . but nations are justified to defend themselves against having an excessive percentage of Israelites in the highest posts in the country. . . . when a Léon Blum, in forming his ministry, calls upon a disproportionate participation of the Jewish element. It is a lack of discretion, . . . tact, characteristic of a certain Judaism. . . . The *numerus clausus* may not be an arrangement to reject out of hand.⁵⁰

If liberal and progressive Catholics took positions such as these, we may infer a sort of consensus in the Catholic milieu by 1940 about the existence of a "Jewish problem" in France and measures of "exclusion" as likely to meet it.

Vichy and the Vatican

In August 1941, Léon Bérard, Vichy's ambassador to the Holy See, tested the Vatican's reactions toward the Jewish laws just enacted in France and found no objection. Back in France there was "quasi-absolute silence of the Catholic hierarchy in the face of the anti-Jewish legislation of Vichy."⁵¹ The dean of the French hierarchy, Cardinal Gerlier, spoke to the leaders of the Jewish community of Lyon in 1941 of the unfortunate "errors" of Léon Blum and "expiation" in the circumstances.⁵² Despite heroic individual acts taken in defense of Jews by individual Catholics—including Gerlier—during the war, many in the hierarchy continued to compromise themselves with racists and anti-Semites to the bitter end, such as when Cardinal Suhard of Paris presided over the funeral services of the notorious *milice* leader and racist radio orator Philippe Henriot on July 1, 1944, in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. In the name of "Christian France," French Catholic leaders found the "exclusion" of the Jews acceptable (in a way not dissimilar to the Israeli leadership's expulsion of Palestinians from their homelands in the name of "Greater Israel" today).

⁵⁰Ibid., 251. It should be mentioned that in its issue of 22 April 1938 Fumet's *Temps Présent*, to which Maritain contributed and to which he was probably as close as to any review in France, had condemned the special issue "*Les Juifs et la France*" published by the fascist review *Je suis partout* (17 February 1938).

⁵¹Pierre Pierrard, *Juifs et catholiques français* (Paris: Fayard, 1970), 297.

⁵²Jacques Duquesne, *Les catholiques français sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Grasset, 1986) (new edition), 245.

The savage attacks on European Jewry during the war was a matter of great personal distress to Maritain. He wrote to his friend Yves R. Simon in September 1941:

How can one live when thinking of the Jews tortured and massacred in Poland . . . of the treatment of the refugees in France . . . If I wasn't responsible to other people, I would return over there to be put to death.⁵³

Yves Simon responded that one had to face the fact that, behind things like Father Tizo's laws against the Jews, there was deep-rooted anti-Semitism in the Church, and recognize that the last decade had seen "a de-Christianization of the Church herself."⁵⁴ Simon insisted that the role of Thomism in the inadequate Catholic response to fascism and militant racism had to be critically examined because "If Saint Thomas were alive today he would be for Pétain, Tizo, and the rest," as the positions taken by leading Thomist of the day, Father Garrigou-Lagrange, demonstrated. Simon helped persuade Maritain that a rethinking of Catholic philosophy was in order. Some important post-war writings on Christian Democratic political philosophy would result.

The deep vein of anti-Semitism in the French Catholic world into which the Maritains converted at the beginning of this century would not soon disappear. But the Maritains retained a particular perspective on the Jews from their godfather Léon Bloy: the conversion of the Jews would announce a "New Middle Ages" and hence racist anti-Semitism was out of place. Citing Saint Thomas, Jacques Maritain always distinguished between the religious Jews with their mysterious supernatural role and the "carnal" Jews. Since Maritain eschewed racial hatred he became known as a great friend of the Jews—even if his "carnal" Jews would not be given total freedom in a "Christian" democracy. While the Christian order would take measures to restrain secularizing Jews, it would denounce racial hatred and keep open the highest of hopes for those Jews of good will, the believing Jews, the potential converts.

Maritain's apparently moderate and common-sensical thinking about the Jews figured in the background to the initial exclusionary measures taken against French Jews by the Vichy regime—even if

⁵³Jacques Maritain to Yves R. Simon, 3 September 1941.

⁵⁴Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 6 November 1941.

Maritain himself would soon be horrified by what followed. Maritain's approach has resurfaced in the thinking of his student John Paul II, whose "Thomist Personalism" envisages the toleration of the Jews as a distinct community within a "Christian Europe" consciously reaffirming Christian values. There was little that was liberal or pluralistic about Maritain's approach to the Jews until he encountered the savagery visited on them by World War II.