

Maritain and the Jewish Question

Vittorio Possenti

Perhaps we still need to understand more deeply the significance of Jerusalem, of Israel, and of Judaism in relation to both the way of the Church and of the Kingdom of God, and to the vicissitudes of universal history. The words of Cardinal Martini seem to me to be illuminating: “Today the Church has still not sufficiently deepened a very strong cultural intuition that weighs like a mortgage on the European conscience: the incapacity to understand what is the true significance of Israel in the history of the world, what is the necessary part that has been reserved to this people in the development of humanity.”¹ These words should properly be joined to a remark of Nicholas Berdyaev’s: “In the destiny of the Jewish people I see the point of intersection, the most violent meeting of both celestial and earthly destinies. Therefore the philosophy of man’s earthly destiny can be made to begin from

(Translator’s Note: The author cites many texts already available in English, but their Italian forms often differ significantly from standard English texts. To avoid clashes between comments and citations, all of the latter are translated from their *Italian* sources as those are quoted by the author. —RR)

¹Cardinal Martini “*Avverso ogni ideologia. Una riflessione sulla cultura di Sant’Ignazio*,” *Segnosette*, no. 22, 4 June 1991, 15. The same author observes in another article: “We must . . . achieve a more lively consciousness of the connection that links the Church to Israel and of the place that has been entrusted to Israel in the divine plan of salvation: this is a theological task of the first importance.” “*La Chiesa si interroga sul Vangelo di libertà da offrire all’Europa*,” *Segnosette*, no. 45, 3 December 1991, 17. The sentences of Cardinal Martini clearly outline the two tasks remaining for the Christian reflection on Israel: its significance in the *history of the world*, and its significance in the *history of salvation*. Maritain’s reflections have contributed to the opening of new pathways in dealing with both of these questions.

the philosophy of Jewish history and from the destiny of the Jewish people. It is necessary to seek here the axis of universal history: during the entire course of world history what is being resolved is the theme set for the world by the destiny of the Jewish people.”² Confronting the Jewish problem we have to go beyond the assumed sufficiency of enlightenment methods in the study of history and to enter into the sphere of a religious way of thinking and of a theology of history, because history begins and ends in God. It does not seem possible to grasp the problem of Israel in its entire breadth solely by placing it on the “natural plane” of social, cultural, and political changes.

In our title we have made reference to the “Jewish question,” but it would be equally valid to speak of the “mystery of Israel” in order to re-emphasize that Maritain’s meditation on the subject is situated more on a religious-theological plane than on the political plane, and tends to clarify the meaning of Israel above all in the light of the word of God. In fact, the volume in which this philosopher has gathered together his own writings on the subject is entitled *The Mystery of Israel*. This makes it impossible to reduce Maritain’s efforts on behalf of the Jewish people exclusively to a political/cultural struggle against anti-Semitism. Rather, his work points toward a deepening of the significance of Israel in salvation history and in temporal history. We do not frequently find, even among Christian thinkers, people who have carried out so intense a reflection on this subject, and particularly in the sense posited by Cardinal Martini and Berdyaev. Maritain’s reflections extend along the entire length of his life with the first shoots appearing in 1905, before, that is, his baptism at twenty-four in 1906.³ His reflections reach their peak in the period of open and bloody anti-Semitism (1937–1945), and they last up to the final work published by Maritain during his lifetime: *The Church of Christ* (1970), where not a few pages are dedicated to the Jewish problem under the eloquent title “The Iniquitous Fate of the Jews in Christendom.”⁴

²Nicholas Berdyaev, *Il senso della storia* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1971), 74.

³In a note from the period January-March 1906, one may read: “The big obstacle to Christianity is the Christians themselves. That’s the thorn that pierces me. Christians have abandoned the poor—and the poor among the nations, the Jews; they’ve abandoned poverty of spirit, the authentic Reason. They inspire horror in me. . . . In such a situation, it is necessary to redouble one’s efforts in interior submission, in waiting, in love for the Church.” Jacques Maritain, *Carnet de Notes* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 40.

⁴These pages, as well as a 1972 letter to André Neher, have been included in the new edition of *Le Mystère d’Israël* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1990), 302. Thus, with the exception of a

One might hypothesize that Maritain had first encountered the Jewish question by his acquaintance with and marriage to Raïssa Oumançoff, a Jew brought to Paris as a child by her parents to escape the pogrom in Russia. Maritain also came to this question by virtue of reading *Le Salut par les Juifs* in 1905, the work of Léon Bloy's that showed to Maritain, as in a revelation, the teaching of Saint Paul on Israel handed down to us in the Epistle to the Romans. The apostle's doctrine (which we assume is known to the reader and about which diverse interpretations exists), exercises the exegetes, but remains from the beginning to the end the fundamental light around which Maritain wove his meditations on Israel.⁵ These meditations can be recapitulated along four principle axes:

- 1) A clarification of the spiritual essence of anti-Semitism as a

few brief texts, this volume encompasses the whole of Maritain's thinking on Israel. In what follows, references to *Le Mystère* are always from this edition.

⁵On the importance of the reading of *Le Salut par les Juifs* (reprinted by Maritain at his own expense in 1905) it is useful to read Raïssa Maritain:

We read this book in the country during August of 1905. It disclosed to us Saint Paul and those extraordinary chapters 9 through 11 in the Epistle to the Romans, from which Léon Bloy took the title and in which the exegesis of *Le Salut par les juifs* is found. . . . Léon Bloy was persuaded, and rightly, that his book was "supernatural inspiration aside . . . the most energetic and urgent Christian testimony in favor of the first-born race, after Saint Paul's Eleventh Chapter to the Romans."

He interpreted it as a Christian voice in defense of Israel, affirming that there are no revocations of divine promises. On the other side, Raïssa observes that he "has shown at length the horror in the Middle Ages for the Jewish people," expressing it "sometimes in inadmissible terms that contaminate *Le Salut par les Juifs* with lawlessness and errors. Raïssa Maritain, *I grandi amici* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1956), 105 ff, 108 ff.

But the essential thing had been transmitted, and the Epistle to the Romans will always be for Maritain the hinge for all his thinking about Israel, even if he later took some distance from some of Bloy's positions. Writing in 1908 to a friend (Father Franck of the French seminary in Rome), he sums it all up thus:

Today, even while otherwise maintaining affection and gratitude toward Bloy, I would not undertake the reprinting of this book whose obscurity once seemed to me full of profundity. Since I have known that which is truly the mystery of the faith, it has become profoundly antipathetic to me and I formally reject certain of its ideas particularly concerning a future advent of the Holy Spirit and a future completion of Revelation, concepts in other ways excessively vague and unformed, upon which Bloy himself never wished and never would have known how to explain. Anyway it is only too clear that he never had the absurd idea of a "real failure of the Redemption"; but only of an "apparent failure."

Quoted in *Jacques Maritain et ses contemporaines* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 31ff.

phenomenon that is ultimately an instance of Christophobia (which Maritain linked to the penetrating intuition of the Jewish writer Maurice Samuel, about whom more later), which leads to a profound spiritual solidarity between Israel and Christianity: "To hate the Jews and to hate Christians comes from the same source, from the same refusal on the part of the world which does not wish to be wounded either by Adam's wounds, by the wounds of the Messiah, by the people of Israel in its movement through time, or by the Cross of Jesus for eternal life."⁶

2) The religious significance of the destiny of the Hebrew people who remain a people of God and, in a certain way, a "mystical body" notwithstanding their rejection of the Messiah. To argue for this assertion, Maritain observes that to form some idea of the mystery of Israel it is necessary to resort to a kind of upside down analogy with the Church, through whom "the mysticism of Israel is a failed Church . . . it is a church unfaithful and rejected . . . repudiated as Church, not as a people. It is always awaited by the spouse who has not ceased to love it."⁷ An analogy exists therefore between the Church and the Synagogue, in the light of the teaching of Saint Paul and of the final reintegration of Israel, when the two peoples of God, that of Israel and that of the Church, finally will be formed into a single people. In the meantime, the Synagogue is a Church blindfolded and turned upside down, but still a depository of the promise of God and of the covenant: "God has always before his eyes that which is at the origin of their [the Jews] obstinate waiting for a Messiah already come: it is *his* love betrayed and outraged by the house of Israel when he had sent his Son, and Jerusalem did not know Him in the time of his visit. Who would dare to say that in Him love has ceded its place to the hunger for vengeance and reprobation? It would be a blasphemy. 'God has not rejected his people' (Romans 11:1 and 2); 'They are always loved because of their forefathers' (Romans 11:28)."⁸

⁶Jacques Maritain, *Le Mystère d'Israël*, 84ff.

⁷Ibid., 40.

⁸He writes *à propos* of the declaration *Nostra Aetate*:

As Sacred Scripture attests, Jerusalem did not know the time when it was visited: the Jews, in great part, did not accept the Good News, and, on the contrary, not a few opposed its diffusion. In any case, according to the Apostle, the Jews, thanks to the Fathers, still remain very dear to God, whose gifts and whose call are without repentance.

3) Significance of Israel for the world, or rather the meaning of its temporal vocation in history in which Israel appears as a kind of “temporal mystical body” dispersed among the peoples.

4) Development or reorientation of universal history represented both by the return of a portion of the Jews into the land of Canaan promised once by God to Abraham and to his descendants (with the consequent foundation of the state of Israel) and by the celebration of the Second Vatican Council.

The Varieties of Anti-Semitism

“It is difficult not to be struck by the extraordinary baseness of the general lines of anti-Semitic propaganda.”⁹ This statement equally applies to the three principal forms of anti-Semitism: first, religious anti-Semitism in its Christian, Muslim, and (in a certain sense) Jewish modes, the Jewish component being configured not infrequently on the basis of atheism; second, economic/sociological anti-Semitism that seems to have developed in central Eastern Europe linked to the possession of conspicuous wealth on the part of the Jews and their massive presence in the professions; and finally, racist anti-Semitism. Maritain reflected on and fought most vigorously against the first and third forms. As regards Christian anti-Semitism, he defines it as an outrage to the son of God (Jewish according to the flesh) and as a pathological alteration of Christian conscience,¹⁰ which the Second Vatican Council has put to an end with its declaration *Nostra Aetate*. This document says the essential things and corresponds to views expressed many times by Maritain: to make known the teaching of Saint Paul on Israel, for the most part scandalously unknown; to review and refine also the vocabulary of the gentiles on Israel; not to present the Jews as rejected by God or as cursed; to bring to light the spiritual patrimony that is common to Christians and Jews; to reject manifestations of anti-Semitism no matter what their source; to remove from our midst as unjustified and theologically false the phrase “deicide race.” On the question about who put Christ to death, it is necessary to reply that every man with his sin crucified Him: the Christian tradition always applied to Christ the prophetic verses of

⁹Jacques Maritain, *Le Mystère d'Israël*, 30.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, cfr. 60.

Isaiah about the suffering servant of Yahweh, the innocent lamb led to the slaughter to expiate the sins of many. Let us recall also that in the *Credo* the Nicene formula for the death of Jesus “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven . . . suffered under Pontius Pilate,” the fault is not attributed to the injustice to the Jews. *Nostra Aetate* explains: “And if the Jewish authorities with their followers operated to help bring about the death of Christ, nonetheless that which was committed during His passion cannot be imputed without distinction to all the Jews then alive nor to the Jews of our time.”¹¹

In substance, Christian anti-Semitism is a perversion of Christianity that is possible only if the eyes of the faith have been darkened and Israel comes to be considered not a mystery to be contemplated in waiting for a hearing and opening to the word of God, but as an enemy race, cursed by God. In many cases anti-Semitism is a false flight forward, that does not resolve anything in any way and that “takes men away from the real causes of their ills.”¹²

Beyond a sociological classification of the various forms of anti-Semitism, the true problem consists in asking if many of these may not be more or less reduced to a common root that would give a reason for the unbridled hatred toward the Israeli people. For Maritain, the answer is not in doubt: “If the world hates the Jews, it is because it feels that

¹¹*Nostra Aetate*, 4. The relevant affirmations of the declaration are not a few. Perhaps it would have been possible to recognize more openly, beyond the abomination of the Nazi Holocaust, the long series of faults and omissions connected to specifically Christian anti-Semitism—and to express a humble request for pardon. Anti-Semitism is certainly deplored, without an explicit recalling, however, of Christian faults.

Nor is it simple curiosity to take note of the incisive words of Pius XI: “Through Christ and in Christ, we are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Anti-Semitism is inadmissible. Spiritually, we are all Semites.” These remarks delivered on 6 September 1938 and carried by various Catholic journals, were not reported by *L'Osservatore Romano* and by *Civiltà Cattolica* for political reasons. Cfr. G. Martina, *La Chiesa nell'età dell'assolutismo, del liberalismo, del totalitarismo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1970), 280, n. 19.

In a recent study, B. Lewis observes:

Today there are several signs that the anti-Semitic virus that has infected Christianity almost from the beginning may finally be on the way to a cure; through a sad paradox, the very same hatred of the Jewish religion has now assaulted the until now resistant body of Islam. It may be that the time for choice is already past and that the virus is already in the bloodstream of Islam, destined to poison it for future generations as it poisoned Christianity for generations past (*Semiti e antisemiti* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990], 292).

¹²Jacques Maritain, *Le Mystère d'Israël*, 72.

they will always be *supernaturally* foreign to it; and because the world detests their passion for the absolute and the unbearable stimulus that they inflict on the world.”¹³ One might also say that at the base of much anti-Semitism lie theological fear and hatred, things that the French philosopher found extraordinary confirmation in the thinking of a Jewish writer, Maurice Samuel. “We will never understand the immense and foolish meaning of anti-Semitism except by transposing its terms. It is of Christ that the Nazi fascists are afraid; and it is in *His* omnipotence that they believe; it is He that they have foolishly decided to annihilate, but the very words Christ and Christianity are too weighty and the habit of respecting them is too deeply rooted over the centuries. It is therefore necessary for them to direct their attack against those who are responsible both for the birth and the expansion of Christianity. They have to spit on the Jews in as much as they have put Christ to death (*as Christ killers*), because they are obsessed by a desire to spit on the Jews insofar as they gave Christ to the world (*as Christ givers*).”¹⁴

The deepest root of many forms of anti-Semitism lies in a resentment against the Gospel, expressed in a Christophobic form,¹⁵ frequently because of an obscure intuition of a secret solidarity between Judaism and Christianity.¹⁶ There is also perhaps a kind of fear and rejection of transcendence, both of which, in my opinion,

¹³Ibid., 84

¹⁴Maurice Samuel, *The Great Hatred* (New York: Knopf, 1940), 23.

¹⁵“The Nazis’ hatred for the Jews masked itself beneath an infinity of pretexts, but in its true nature is a supernatural hatred, a Satanic hatred that detests the Jews because they are the people of God and gave Christ to the world: it is the psychopathological disguise of Christophobia.” *Le Mystère d’Israël*, 194.

¹⁶On several particularly notable pages of *A Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche singles out among the Jews, the priestly people par excellence, those who initiated and brought to a successful completion the revolt of the slaves in the moral realm, succeeding in reversing the aristocratic equation by which good is solely the strong, the potent, the beautiful, the cruel, and by substituting another scale of values where only the poor, the impotent, the last, the wretched, the suffering, the indigent are pious and good. Christianity did nothing but pick up the inheritance of the Jewish transvaluation (“We know *who* picked up the inheritance of this Jewish transvaluation”) (23).

For Nietzsche, a new love that sprouted from the trunk of Jewish hatred turned implacably against the aristocratic values of force and power, and a love that was particularly intense because unequalled in creating ideals and transmuting values—Christian love, not as the negation of the Jewish, but as its fulfillment. Jesus of Nazareth is the most dangerous lure cast before the world by the Jews because through such a lure they have conquered the world and completed the transvaluation of all values and the victory of slave morality.

are expressed, for example, in several passages of the young Hegel, particularly in his *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Destiny*. Whoever reflects on the scornful Hegelian judgments on the Jewish people and on their faith may find, in addition, a simple anti-Semitism there, if not a virulent and open one. In particular, does not one also find there an indirect and refined attack against Christianity (one that has a fear of striking frontally) and the manifest rejection of every kind of transcendence and theonomic ethics?

The Vocation of Israel

But we see now the sense of the mystery and of the vocation of Israel meditated on in the light of Saint Paul's teaching. Our French philosopher denotes Israel as a failed Church, unfaithful, repudiated as Church, not as a people; it is always waited for and loved by the God-Spouse, always the receiver of his promises that are without repentance.

"Beyond all the vicissitudes of its own exile and of the history of the world, Israel always remains the people of God, stricken but always loved on account of its Fathers," even though it may no longer possess a messianic or salvific mission with regard to humanity.¹⁷ From Paul we learn the high prerogatives of the Hebrew people to

Did Israel not reach, precisely through the route travelled by this "redeemer," this apparent opponent and solvent of Israel, the extreme aim of its sublime avidity for vengeance? Does it not present the obscure black magic of a truly *great* politics of vengeance . . . that Israel itself had to deny and crucify before all the world, as a kind of mortal enemy, the true instrument of her vengeance, so that "the whole world," that is, all the enemies of Israel, may without hesitation bite at the lure? Could one otherwise imagine, taking the movement from every refinement of spirit, another *more dangerous* lure? Something that could equal for force of attraction, inebriating, stunning, corrupting, that symbol of the "Holy Cross" that fearful paradox of a God "on the cross," that mystery of an inconceivable, ultimate, extreme cruelty and self-crucifixion of God for the salvation of men? . . . It is far more certain that *sub hoc signo* Israel has made triumphant, even today, over all other ideals, over all the *more noble* ideals, her vendetta and her transvaluation of all values. (*Genealogia della morale* [Milan: Adelphi, 1988], 24.)

If, in the Nietzschean reading, Jesus is an instrument of Israel, a fully and completely Jewish instrument to bring to completion the most exalted revolution, the transvaluation of all values, what else does this mean but that he is the climax of Israel? Few have glimpsed like this atheistic philosopher (even if it came from aberrant philosophy and morals), anti-Christ and anti-Jew, the solidarity between Judaism and Christianity.

¹⁷Jacques Maritain, *Le Mystère d'Israël*, 153. And also: "To the eyes of a Christian who remembers that God's promises are without repentance, Israel continues her sacred mission:

whom have been confided the oracles of God; it bears the name of Israel, the well beloved by God; it is the adopted son of God; to whom was manifested the glory, the *schechina*; to whom belong the alliances many times renewed by God with his people; to whom the Torah, the cult, the messianic prophecies, the patriarchs; to whom finally Christ born from the root of Abraham and from the blood of David according to the flesh.

And if Israel did not recognize the Messiah who came in the fullness of time, and therefore is for Paul without excuse in its misunderstanding the justice of God, these things have not led to the repudiation of God's people. Their failure has become the salvation of the Gentile nations; "I ask therefore, has God perhaps repudiated his people? Impossible! . . . Perhaps they stumbled to fail forever? Certainly not. But because of their failure, salvation came to the pagans, to arouse their jealousy. If, therefore, their failure has become the riches of the world, and their failure the riches of the pagans, what will it not be when they come to their total participation!" (Romans 11:1 and 11–12).

With the Jewish refusal, the Gentiles were grafted onto the good olive tree of Israel, but precisely they who constituted the wild olive cannot boast of themselves, the sap coming from the ancient Hebrew root and not from themselves: "If, however, some branches have been cut and you, being holy after them, have been grafted in their place, becoming thus the participants in the root and of the trunk of the olive, don't vaunt yourself much against the branches; if you want to exalt yourself, know that you are not those who bear the root, but it is a root that bears you. . . . As to them, if they will not persevere in infidelity, even they will be grafted anew!" (Romans 11:17 ff.). And the apostle continues with a final word in which he is aware of revealing a mystery, by which to avoid the error that those converted from paganism will try to deal with a religious problem according to a merely human wisdom: "I do not wish that you would remain ignorant, brothers, of this mystery so that you may not be presumptuous: the hardening of one part of Israel will remain until all the people will have entered in, then all Israel will be saved as well."¹⁸

but in the night of the world, that she has preferred to that of God. With blindfolded eyes, the Synagogue still walks in the universe of God's designs," 32.

¹⁸Romans 11:25–26. In this regard, the Jerusalem Bible observes that Paul is always aiming at two collectivities: the bloc of the Jewish world and the whole of the pagan world. *Nostra*

The reintegration of Israel will constitute the glory and splendor of the world and of the Church, and the characteristic sign of a third age of history, to which Maritain assigns a different meaning than that attributed to it by Gioacchino da Fiore.¹⁹ In that age, the reintegration of Israel and the flowering of a humanism both integral and theocentric in the Incarnation will be mutually reinforcing.

All this means that Israel properly speaking is a mystery, “of the same order of mystery in the world as the mystery of the Church. At heart, like these, of the Redemption.”²⁰ The mystery continues to be realized, even after the non-recognition of the Messiah, but in *a diverse form*, the mission of Israel and of her “mystical body.” According to Maritain, “the communion of this body, is not the communion of saints, it is the communion of terrestrial Hope. Israel hopes passionately, awaits, desires the advent of God in the world, the Kingdom of God *here below*.”²¹ As a result it carries out a double role in regard to the history of the world and the salvation of the world. It is a witness that conserves the deposit of the scriptures and at the same time obeys a unique vocation: “While the Church is assigned the work of the supernatural and supertemporal redemption of the world, Israel is assigned, in the order of the temporal history and of its own proper finality, to the work of the terrestrial activation of the mass of the world . . . it stimulates the movement of history.”²²

Aetate teaches: “With the prophets and with the same Apostle (Paul) the Church waits for the day that God alone knows in which all peoples will acclaim the Lord with one voice and will serve him standing shoulder to shoulder” (Wisdom III: 9).

¹⁹Commenting on the running of the two apostles, Peter and John, to the tomb of the Lord, Thomas Aquinas writes:

The two peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, are symbolized at the tomb of Christ by the two apostles. They run to Christ simultaneously across the ages: the Gentiles by way of their natural law, the Jews by virtue of their written law. The Gentiles, like Peter, who arrive second at the Sepulcher, arrived later at the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but, also like Peter, they enter first. The Jewish people, the first to know the mystery of the Redemption, will be the last converted to the faith of Christ. . . . *Then*, says the Gospel, *John entered*; Israel must not remain eternally at the entrance of the Sepulcher. After Peter will have entered, will have penetrated there himself, because at the end the Jews as well will be gathered into the faith. (*In Joan.*, XVIII, lect. I.)

²⁰Jacques Maritain, *Le Mystère d'Israël*, 24.

²¹*Ibid.*, 40.

²²*Ibid.*, 43.

Israel's indestructible hope is a potent force of ferment, no longer a specific messianic mission with regard to humanity, but a temporal task consequent to a this-worldly projection of the Hebrew faith. In such a way Israel seems to conform itself to the mission of the two peoples of God, that of the ancient covenant and that of the people of Christ, insofar as regards their two crosses, the cross of survival borne by the Jewish people and the cross of redemption borne by the Church, and they will recognize one another and will form *a single cross*, to offer salvation to men.²³

Perhaps these incomplete notes are sufficient, though they should be amplified and lengthened enough to show that the pages of Maritain on this subject reject a purely secularized interpretation of Israel and of anti-Semitism. "Nothing is more absurd than to try to dampen anti-Semitism by renouncing the privilege of being a 'chosen people' However the notion of a "chosen people" is acceptable only from the religious and supernatural point of view: behold the problem for the irreligious Jew."²⁴ One cannot explain anti-Semitism in purely sociological and economic terms, even if in the 1938 text *Les Juifs parmi les nations* Maritain does not exclude those categories in his examination of the circumstances facing Jews in Russia, Germany, Poland, Romania, etc.

If such is the hidden meaning of Israel for the history of salvation and for the history of the world, then the Hebrew problem is *without definitive solution* prior to the end times announced by the Apostle Paul. Only then will the reintegration of Israel take place and the regrafting of the natural branches (Jewish) onto the noble olive from which they were cut by their infidelity. To the question of whether the Jewish problem may be solvable then, it is necessary to make some calibrated responses. If by the Jewish question we mean that the Jews will have a territory and a state, the solution is both possible and even already under way; if we mean a potentially final end to anti-Semitism, it may be that such an occurrence will take place, even if one may harbor some doubts in this regard because of the specifically theological Christophobic nature of the anti-Semitic phenomenon. If

²³Ibid., 292.

²⁴Jacques Maritain, *Il mistero di Israele* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1964), 120. The chapter from which this quotation is drawn ("*L'antisemitismo come problema per gli Ebrei*") does not appear in the 1990 French edition.

finally one understands the end of anti-Semitism as something analogous to the dénouement of the enigma of universal history and of its significance, an enigma that can be solved solely in a religious way, supernaturally and in God, then this can occur only within the unique story of salvation. According to Berdyaev “a definitive solution of the Jewish question is possible only on the eschatological plane; and it will also be the solution of the destiny of universal history in the final act of the struggle of Christ with the Antichrist. If Jewishness does not join itself to a religious self-definition, it will not be possible to resolve the task of universal history.”²⁵ In the Russian writer’s allusion to the eschatological plane, should one understand that the Jewish question will have a solution only at the moment in which terrestrial history will reach a completion? Rather I would think about an eschatology as a beginning of the end times of the history of salvation under the reintegration of which Paul speaks, and which may have a not brief duration (according to the Jerusalem Bible, Paul does not affirm that the conversion of Israel must immediately proceed the general resurrection).

The Return to Palestine and the State of Israel

About the return of a part of the Jewish people to the Promised Land, Maritain expressed himself in a postscript of 1964 and in several pages in *The Church of Christ* (1970) according to positions that read that event as a development in universal history.²⁶ In the very same

²⁵Berdyaev, *Il senso de la storia*, 88. According to Berdyaev the Jewish people introduced into life in this world the principle of the “historical” in such a way that it is impossible to arrive at a materialist explanation of Jewish history: that history opposes itself without middle terms to historical materialism. The Russian philosopher has meanwhile understood the strong links between Socialist messianism and Jewish messianism: “Socialist messianism has Jewish roots and in the Christian world signifies waiting for a false Christ, waiting for the anti-Christ” (89). He has also understood that the anti-Semites do not understand the religious significance of the Jewish question (cfr., 90), including the indissoluble solidarity between the destiny of the Jewish people and the destiny of Christian history, and vice versa (a point of the highest significance because in the past the Christians tried to expel the Jewish dimension as extraneous and irrelevant). It remains difficult to explain the lack of explicit recourse by Berdyaev to the teachings of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans since he intended to elaborate a religious philosophy of history in which the religious turn of the Jewish people is central: “The Jewish people rejected the Crucified One and ended up being themselves crucified in their destiny” (86).

²⁶Cfr., 291. La Pira too has perceived, almost contemporaneously, the great novelty, constituting a reorientation of universal history, represented by the return of Israel to Palestine. In a

pages there are also presented criteria for reflection and judgment about the state of Israel.

The first affirmation defended by the French philosopher is the full right of the Jewish people to the land of Canaan, a right based on the assignment of the land to them forever by God: "The people of Israel is the only people in the world to whom a land, the land of Canaan, has been given by the true God, the sole and transcendent God, creator of the universe and of the human race. And that which God has given once is given forever."²⁷ God's assignment of the Promised Land to the tribe of Israel was stated several times: to Abraham (Genesis 12: 7; 13: 15; 15: 18; 17: 8); to Isaac (*ibid.*, 26: 3); to Jacob-Israel (*ibid.*, 28: 13; 35: 12); to Moses (Exodus, 6: 8). In the first reference one reads: "Yahweh appeared to Abraham and said: I will give this land

1961 letter to some cloistered nuns, the then-mayor of Florence observes: "I remain 'stunned', as one says, when I reflect seriously on the most evident historical miracle of today: the return of the Jews to Palestine. It is a 'sign of the times' of such gigantic proportions as to leave 'stunned' all who seek to discern its meaning! What does it mean in God's plan?" [*Lettere alle claustrali* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1978), 274.]

For La Pira there is a connection between the new age of the Church, that will follow on the reintegration of Israel, and the new age of the world, that will come with the entrance of the world into peace and brotherhood. The new age of the Church will also be the new age of the world and vice versa: "Behold, Most Reverend Mother, the ultimate meaning—it appears to us!—of the events of our time: that is, they confirm every day, through many signs, the existence of this 'commandment' of God, of this design of God's: that commandment and design of which Pius XII speaks almost prophetically (historical spring and historical summer); which are signs emphasized by the Second Vatican Council; which are signs so marked by political, technical, and scientific events (even events in space) of these end times and end days: that commandment and design in which is prepared precisely the entrance of all Israel—that is, all the peoples of the earth: ancient and modern Israel—into the promised land of peace and brotherhood; in which is prepared, that is, the entrance of world history into a new season (spring) that will have as its essential characteristic the uprooting of war and the transformation of the instruments of destruction into instruments of construction, swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2: 1 ff). The new epoch that will gradually see all people flower in the grace of Christ; it will see, that is, the resurrection of Israel (Romans 11) and the entrance of Israel and all peoples into the common household of the Lord; that will see embarked upon the Bark of Peter—through the great historical 'adventure' of the new times—all the peoples and all the nations of the earth!" (letter of 30 September 1962, 333).

²⁷The French philosopher continues thus: "The Christian faith holds in effect that the Holy Spirit is the principal author of the Scriptures; and however great may be the instrumental role played in their redaction by human conditions—customs and mentality of this or that epoch—with which exegesis and history concern themselves, there will always remain the fact that the intention of the author inspired by the Holy Spirit is not in doubt: the Creator of the heavens and the earth has given the Promised Land to the Jews by the free decree of his will" (*Le Mystère d'Israël*, 243 ff).

to your descendants” and the Jerusalem Bible comments: “Gift of the Holy Land.”²⁸

In addition, Maritain distinguishes the rights conceded by God to the Jewish people over the land of Canaan from the state of Israel: the reiteration of the promises does not make the latter a theocratic state by divine right, but a state like all others, or rather, a temporal and secular entity, subject to international law, such that the spiritual possession by the people, which the God of Abraham and of Moses reserved for them, is explicitly distinguished from the temporal possession by a people who form a given state.²⁹

With the birth of the state of Israel, the situation of the people of Israel and the world entered into a new phase; this people is almost bi-polar or differentiated between the Diaspora among the nations on the one hand and the political unity of the Israeli people on the other. The latter should begin to realize in time the hope of Israel. Now, if the Jews of the Diaspora are to be recognized with an absolute equality of rights and of opportunity in the states of which they are members, they must maintain their spiritual identity as Jewish members of the people of God. This signifies that the philosopher of history must consider now a double tension, in a very different sense, in history: first, that tragic tension between Israel and the world, and next, that new and fraternal tension between the Jewish state

²⁸Maritain sketched this chapter in 1964. The date must be kept in mind as well as the fact that the author did not intend to fix any specific limit for the state of Israel. On the Palestinian question, the philosopher, aware above all of the theologically dominant elements in the problem of Israel, expressed himself soberly. In his view, the rights of the Palestinians are those of the human person in each one of us (the task for Israel, then, is to respect the Arab population in its territory); there is also a right “to a compensation that would repair in the best way possible the harms they have suffered” (*Le Mystère d’Israël*, 283, note).

²⁹“Temporal and secular, the state of Israel is such in principle and right; it will not be so truly, in fact, except when it will succeed in liberating itself from theocratic pressures exercised by a so-called ‘orthodox’ minority that, instead of working on the religious plane to rediscover eternal values without which no spiritual function or mission is conceivable, insists on wishing to impose, on the political plane, a certain simulacrum of a sacral State . . .” (*Le Mystère d’Israël*, 246 ff.). “The State of Israel, in so far as it is a state, is a state just like all the others,” even if its existence was considered by Maritain a just and necessary thing (*Ibid.*, cfr., 284). Let us recall finally that the most recent official document of the Holy See on this question, *Jews and Judaism in the Catholic Church*, a document from the Secretariat for Christian Unity (published June 24, 1985), speaks in the following terms: “Inasmuch as one refers to the existence of the state of Israel and to its political choices, these should be seen through a lens that is not religious per se, but that appeals to the common principles of international law.”

in the Holy Land and the Jewish people of the Diaspora. With the birth of the state of Israel, there began to take on flesh, therefore, a certain disjunction between spiritual Judaism—scattered throughout the world—and temporal Judaism concentrated in one state, while in a Jerusalem both single and double (Jerusalem as the head of the people of God and Jerusalem as head of the Jewish nation) is concentrated the hope of all Israel: “The spiritual possession of the God of Abraham and Moses appears as differentiating itself explicitly now from the temporal possession of the people occupying the given territory in forming the given state.”³⁰ Such a state, analogous to the scheme of a democratic state, secular or profane, that is authentically Christian in inspiration, ought to be characterized as democratic, secular or profane, but authentically Jewish in inspiration.

The most notable significance of the disjunction of which we have been speaking, may be traced in the possible development of the religious crisis in the conscience of Israel: a definition of the Israel of God that is not ethnic but is purely spiritual and universal. In this process, one may think that there may occur a change in the attitude toward Jesus, above all in practical behavior rather than doctrines, such that the people of Israel, inasmuch as they will act on that which they will believe, will be brought to reconsider and become a tributary of the Good News.³¹

The Meaning of a Search

The general law seems to hold that it is not easy for anyone to address the Jewish problem, because it intrinsically involves the purposes of God himself in the history of salvation. In the same way as the patriarch Jacob after the struggle with the angel, every discourse on Israel is, as it were, limping and incomplete: it is not so much the expression as the object itself that is mysterious. From this does not flow an appeal to modesty, but rather an invitation to seek to understand with the proper instruments: faith, prayer, meditation on the word. The French thinker did not shy from confronting the task: his assiduous meditations propose a *Christian theology of the mystery of Israel* that for a long time was lacking in the Church

³⁰Jacques Maritain, *Le Mystère d'Israël*, 249.

³¹Ibid., cfr. 250.

and through which perhaps it is possible to find the right answer to the question posed by Cardinal Martini and Berdyaev above. In fact, practical suggestions are not nearly enough for the bettering of relations with Judaism.

Notwithstanding the persistent attack on Maritain by the philosophical, theological, and political right,³² various indications lead us to believe that his meditation on Israel was decisive for the Christian conscience in our century and for the renewal of the entire Church with regard to the Jewish reality and mystery of Israel. We can approach the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council³³ by this route. Even after 1945, the French philosopher continued his action in various ways, taking as a point of departure the conditions in which he found himself, for example as ambassador of France to the Holy See, which permitted him to observe from a close vantage point the development of the government of the Church.³⁴ Among the many

³²Some brief notes on the subject may be found in my introduction to Maritain's *Ragione e ragioni* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1982).

³³Cfr. for example, M. Dubois, "Jacques Maritain e il mistero d'Israele" in *Jacques Maritain oggi*, ed. Vittorio Possenti (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1983), 440–55. Also see the testimony of G. Dossetti who, joining the Resistance, read in 1943 the essay "L'impossibile antisemitismo," published in the volume *Questions de conscience* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1938). He is afterwards to be considered a debtor to Maritain for his reading of the Jewish problem.

³⁴The Jewish problem stood at the peak of his preoccupations, according to a scholar who sums up the connections between Paul VI and the philosopher: "After the horrible fate that struck the people of Israel, [Maritain] hoped that the Church, through the voice of the pope, would make itself heard and condemn anti-Semitism solemnly. He began working toward this with Monsignor Montini in a long letter of 12 July 1946: "Such an act would have an extraordinary importance in preserving souls and the Christian conscience from an always threatening spiritual danger, in touching the hearts of many Jews, and in preparing in the depths of history the great reconciliation that the Apostle announced and which the Church has never ceased desiring." Upon receiving the letter four days later, Pope Pius XII referred him back to the discourse he had given on 16 July 1946 to a group of deported Jews liberated from the concentration camps in November 1945. In August, Maritain could note with satisfaction an allocution to some Arab delegates where Pius XII recalls that he had condemned "the persecutions and fanatical anti-Semitism let loose against the Jewish people" (3 August 1946). In spite of all his efforts to sensitize the Holy See through Montini (above all at the time of the Seelisberg Conference in July 1947), Maritain did not get anything more from the pope. "He did not want to deal with the mystery of Israel," Maritain notes, almost desperately, in his diary after another papal audience with the Jewish representatives (9 February 1948). During his final meeting with Montini before leaving Rome, Maritain was promised that a change was already under way (3 June 1948) in the liturgy of Good Friday, in which the "perfidy" of the deicide race was mentioned. The modification, to which the Jews would be very sensitive, did not occur until John XXIII. P. Cheneaux, "Paul VI et Maritain," in *Jacques Maritain et ses contemporaines*,

things to come out of Maritain's works in this regard, one of the most notable would be in his call to return to the original solidarity between Judaism and Christianity, a perception which became progressively more intense.³⁵ And what does it mean to say this if not that a new relationship is necessary between Jews and Christians, in which everyone would reconsider more deeply his own roots, his own dignity and that of the other? In this process, truly, Jews and Christians will have to confront common sorrows, common struggles, common adversaries.³⁶

It will be the task of the Christians to "know better the fundamental components of the Jewish religious tradition and to learn the central

332. From this book, some information may be drawn about the particularly insulting attacks against Maritain (for example, by the magazine *La Vieille France*) owing to his position on Judaism and even because of the Jewish ancestry of his wife.

³⁵While the interpretation of Israel in the light of temporal history seems completely settled by 1937, there are slight retouchings and deepening noticeable in the religious significance of Israel that come out in the idea of two peoples of God in brotherhood and reunited by common persecutions and sorrows (*Le Mystère d'Israël*, cfr. 295, ff.). And the meditation becomes more intense in light of the rule never to separate the mystery of Israel and the mystery of the Church because in a future hidden in the arms of God his two people will form one alone.

In a brief text from 1921, "*À propos la question Juive*" (Communication to the "*Semaine des Ecrivains Catholiques*" published later with additions and updatings in 1926 and now collected in the *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 2, 1196–1203, but not inserted into *Le Mystère d'Israël*), Maritain distinguishes two aspects—one political-social the other spiritual-theological—of the Jewish question, rendering an altogether severe judgment on the first, by reason of the presence of a Jewish spirit in the majority of the great revolutionary movements of the modern epoch, in which a will to destruction is carried out. While the French philosopher expresses his belief that one cannot expect a real attachment of the Jews to the common good of Western and Christian civilization, he asks also that one reflect without hatred on the Jewish problem, avoiding both a setting loose of popular passions and a singling out of the Jews as the sole cause of present evils (as if the serious infidelities of the Christians did not exist). However we can already detect in germ the hermeneutical principle that will be taken up again, developed, and refined in 1937, according to which the Messianic hope and the passion for justice among the Jews tend to be displaced from the supernatural plane to the temporal plane, acting as a leaven for activation and revolution.

As for the spiritual-theological aspect, the reliance on Saint Paul is explicit and the reminder that Christians are grafted on a Jewish trunk, that of the prophets, the Virgin, the apostles, and Jesus himself: "The sharper the Jewish question becomes politically, the more necessary that the manner in which we treat such a question may be suited to the divine drama which it evokes" (1199).

³⁶"It is necessary that Christians understand truly that God has not rejected, but continues ever to love the sons of Israel, and that it is *His love* that has allowed such a long suffering; and it is necessary that the Jews understand truly that it is not the Will to Power but the *Charity of Christ* that animates the efforts of the Church toward men" (*Le Mystère d'Israël*, 292).

characteristics with which the Jews define themselves in their lived religious reality" ("Orientations and suggestions for the application of a conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*, no. 4"), and to have done once and for all with religiously or theologically motivated anti-Semitism, which is an injury to the Gospel. After the coming of Christ, the Jews were not rejected and scorned by God; they continue to possess the adoption as sons and are still dear to God thanks to the Fathers. Perhaps it was here that there began a very significant change in the contemporary Church precisely on the theme of Israel, more decisive than others, which has been much talked about, because it concerns both the very heart of the mystery of salvation and the essence of Christianity and the design of God.

In order to be complete, the Jewish-Christian friendship requires that, as Christians have begun to renew and to deepen their meditation on Israel, that the Jews ask themselves what the meaning of Christianity may be. What is the Jewish comprehension of Christianity? Which changes in their attitude toward the Church correspond to the changes of the Church toward Judaism? The best and most authoritative response cannot help but come from the people of Yahweh through a profound religious comprehension of themselves, in the light of the word of God. I confess to not possessing a sufficient knowledge of this side of the problem. It even seems to me a significant trend that the answer sometimes suggested by Jewish voices augurs a leveling of all faiths to the same plane.³⁷ Do we not obscure in this way the identity of the Synagogue and the Church? I wouldn't think that there exists an enlightenment or liberal solution to the problem of religious pluralism, and—less than ever—a liberal solution to the mystery of Israel or to the mystery of the Church: they cannot be secularized and put on the same plane with other religious beliefs, assigning all of

³⁷Gabriele Levi touches on this theme in an important commentary ("*La Chiesa e gli ebrei*," *La Repubblica*, 15 February 1991) in which he asks if from the point of view of the Church the Jews have a right "to be saved beyond the Cross and outside of the Cross and solely by the Law," which would signify a complete autonomy of Judaism and its salvation not by Grace but by Law. He observes rightly that an extension of this position would lead to the "right/need" of all human cultures to express diverse religious cultures, of equal dignity. If it came to the pass that (if I understand correctly) he seems to wish, would there not also follow simultaneously the cancellation of the singularity of Christ *and* of the *verus Israel* of the Old Testament? All this may lead us to think that it may be urgent for Judaism to define itself religiously, and then to define Christianity and the other religions.

them at the very outset equal value and equal dignity. But they can only be understood at an ever greater depth under the impulse of God. And if, finally, I may be permitted a personal comment, should not both Judaism and Christianity today invite man to discover how to be theomorphic, to enter into a higher sphere of life, which comprehends the *magnalia Dei*? And should not they contrast their understanding with the religious decline of the West, and the consequent European nihilism? Should not they both be trying to give meaning to history in a world without God?

—Translated by Robert Royal