

Bloy, Maritain, and Salvation by the Jews

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There is probably no group of intellectuals more aware of the existence of Léon Bloy as a writer of some importance than those who also study Jacques Maritain. Most, however, would probably experience some difficulty in defining just what this importance is. Certainly this observation would apply to Bloy's book on the mystery of the Jews, *Le Salut par les Juifs* (*Salvation by the Jews*), frequently mentioned, seldom read, never translated into English. Its very nature leaves even the most devoted reader of Bloy abashed.

This lack of surprise may come primarily from the fact that *Le Salut par les Juifs* is dedicated to Raïssa Maritain and many believe emanated from spiritual currents common to Bloy and the Maritains. Did Bloy, godfather to Raïssa and her sister, Vera Oumançoff, not actually write *Le Salut par les Juifs* with them in mind? It appears so on the surface, but in Bloy's foreword to the 1906 edition we learn that *Le Salut par les Juifs* was first published in 1892, thirteen years before Bloy had even heard of the Maritains. In 1892, Bloy's amateur publisher went bankrupt and, having no contract with Bloy, he carried off all the copies of what Bloy considered his most important work and "the strongest and most urgent Christian witness in favour of the Beloved Race since Saint Paul's chapter 11 to the Romans."¹

¹Léon Bloy, *Le Salut par les Juifs* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), 6–7.

Dated November 19, 1905, Bloy's little foreword to the 1906 edition is even more striking when we recall that he had met the Maritains just five months previously, on June 25, and that they and Vera Oumançoff would not be baptized until June 11, 1906, almost seven months after he dated this foreword. It appears then that well before Raïssa had actually become Bloy's godchild, he had made the following dedication:

TO RAÏSSA MARITAIN
I dedicate these pages
written for the Catholic glory
of the God
of Abraham,
Isaac
and Jacob.

What this dedication contributed to the Maritain-Oumançoff conversions, no one can say. As Judith Suther pointed out in her recent volume, Raïssa did urge Jacques "to arrange for the reprinting, at their expense, of Bloy's treatise . . . in 1906."² Again, however, the actual ties between this reprinting and Bloy's dedication can only be surmised.

What concerns us primarily in any case is Jacques's thought on the mystery of the Jews, not Bloy's. Thus my opening presentation of Bloy's rather startling—even disturbing—speculations will be somewhat limited. I should also point out that Jacques's writings on the Jews, with one tiny exception, completely—I myself would be tempted to say "scrupulously"—avoid any mention of Léon Bloy's *Le Salut par les Juifs*. With one exception only, Bloy's quotations on the Jewish question in Maritain come not from *Le Salut par les Juifs*, but from Bloy's 1910 text, *Le Vieux de la montagne*.

A Mysterious Absence

Why should this be so? Why should Jacques Maritain who, we know, venerated his old godfather, when writing about the same topic, so scrupulously avoid any reference to a text dedicated to his wife?

²Judith D. Suther, *Raïssa Maritain: Pilgrim, Poet, Exile* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 49.

Indeed, why keep silent about a text that they, the Maritains, had esteemed important enough for a new edition to stimulate public dissemination?

Certainly Bloy's genius is undeniable when he remarks that it is from the Jews that have come all the Secretaries of the Commandments of God. And since Christians recognize that they are the Secretaries of the Commandments of God, Bloy argues that it is the Jews alone who hold the answer to that unity necessary to bring together, in this world, all the mysteries of God.

Yet Bloy shocks us when we look at the fundamental idea around which *Le Salut par les Juifs* turns, that is, that until the Jews believe in the Crucified, He will remain on the cross. The Jews are even, he maintains, the very cross to which He is nailed. For they have nailed Him, the Lord of Glory, there, and they have kept Him there, and they alone can bring Him down. Do the words of the Gospel not state that if He comes down from the cross they will believe in Him? (cf. Matt. 27:43).

Already we are far indeed from anything we will ever read in Maritain. Bloy's essentially mystical approach is of an apocalyptic nature, alien to Maritain's deep preoccupations with the social and with the whole question of social justice. These questions, centered essentially on man and on human society are, moreover, questions that, I believe, continue to woo and win for Maritain countless Western Christian disciples.

Bloy, on the other hand, dazzled as it were by the divine glory, thinks only in terms of reaching out to God, of trying to touch God. He also has the gift of disconcertingly shattering our usual frames of reference by the way he thinks of the ineffable mysteries of God. As for man, he is a sort of expendable creature for Bloy, something reflected in one of his more genial remarks about recognizing unmistakably that God is involved whenever we see the innocent and the guilty suffer alike in a catastrophe.

For Bloy, democracy has nothing to do with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The race of men condemned Him to death by majority vote, a democratic process confirmed by the *vox populi* shouting, "Crucify Him!" and "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas!" So much for the so-called sacred voice of the people and the will of the majority where God is concerned.

Surely it is helpful to recall that quite apart from anything having to do with the Jewish question, Bloy strongly identified the Incarnation

of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary with two basic realities of man's temporal life: blood and money. In his work entitled *Le Sang du pauvre* (*The Blood of the Poor*) he reminds us of the incontrovertible fact that the blood of God incarnate was negotiated and purchased by the race of men for a mere thirty pieces of silver. This was an absolute act with eternal implications: it involved nothing less than the way the human race reacts to the incarnation of the Absolute.

The Eternal Significance of Money

Given this as a point of departure, one can see that it is but a step to what Bloy always maintained about money—that precious substance he always lacked, and about which he was ever writing, begging it from his more successful friends and then complaining that they had not sent more. Since it was, Bloy assures us, the lack of money that was responsible for the untimely death of his two very young sons, his experience of poverty was authentic and concrete beyond what most of us can even imagine.

Bloy maintains moreover that he who accumulates money—be he Jew or Gentile—inevitably accumulates the blood of the poor. He hoards it, longs to increase his holdings, and the more he holds the better he likes it. Yet this mystical blood of the poor is always really the blood of God, since Jesus Christ was the poorest of the poor, the incarnation of poverty itself, having emptied Himself of his divine glory and lowered Himself to become incarnate for us men and for our salvation by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

In chapter nine Bloy pushes his symbolism into more complex patterns when he maintains that what was crucified in Jesus was not just flesh and blood, but money itself. Bloy tells us that in the language of the Holy Spirit the human terms for *Word*, for *Flesh*, for the *Poor*, and for *Money* (or “silver,” since the French word “*argent*” means both “money” and “silver”) are, all four of them, valid terms for designating our Saviour Jesus Christ. All four, be it the Word, the Flesh, the Poor, or Money, were crucified with Him.

Where Bloy will probably startle us most, however, is when he maintains that the crucifixion demonstrates for us the Jewish way of exterminating the divine. Offered God's Incarnation in Jesus Christ, the Jews tried to exterminate their own Messiah by raising Him up on the cross, by elevating Him and thereby isolating Him from the Poor whose very substance He is. Bloy's basic assumption that there is a

tie between the Jews and the crucifixion has, of course, in our own generation, become anathema to the “political correctness” expounded by the Vatican and its adherents.³ That there is, and ever will be, a definite, eternal, and mystical tie between the Jews and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ cannot however be any more denied by an Orthodox Christian than can the idea that the destiny of all men is related for all eternity to that unique event. Only through such a mystical vision as this could Bloy envisage that great day when the Jews believe and Jesus descends from the cross in accordance with the Gospel itself. Until that day, He who symbolizes Money, Flesh, the Divine Word, and the Poor, is kept crucified, while awaiting the conversion of His own people. He is thus, Bloy concludes, as it were, nailed to Israel itself.

In chapter twenty-eight Bloy points out that it is not possible to present the ineffable destiny of the Jews in regard to this mystery except in supposing a sort of antagonism in the very bosom of the Holy Trinity. He excuses himself for such foolishness, yet maintains that it is not otherwise possible to sense the ineffable, inexpressible destiny of the Jews. Bloy states that whenever one speaks amorously of God, all human words resemble the ferocious, disoriented roars of blinded lions, lost in the desert, and searching vainly for a spring.

Bloy dares attempt therefore to express the ineffable destiny of the Jews by hinting at a sort of provisional suspension of the eternal conflict on the part of God between His Justice and His Mercy, between Love and Prudence. And he will assure us, the only thing that can go beyond the antagonism between Justice and Mercy, and between Love and Prudence, is the Glory of God. Thus if God’s justice tends to condemn those who keep Him on the cross by not believing in Him, He will nonetheless save them because of His glory: He is God and they are His people, even if they were responsible for having Him slaughtered by the Romans, and still keep Him on the cross by their disbelief.

The Appeal to Glory

To illustrate how God’s glory overrides all else, Bloy turns to an anecdote recounted by his friend, Ernest Hello, whose writings had

³Vatican Council II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, 28 October 1965, in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin P. Flannery (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 741–42.

a profound impact not only on Bloy, but also on the young Georges Bernanos, as well as on one of today's foremost French composers, Olivier Messiaen. Bloy recalls an unwritten but unforgettable parable told him by Hello concerning the damnation of a hideous reprobate, full of blasphemy and wickedness, cursed by heaven and earth alike. Damned by the cries of the Poor whom he had neglected, he was cursed by the elements of the earth and, worst of all, even by our Lord Jesus Christ who is in eternal need since He awaits for all the poor to be fed and clothed and given to drink before He Himself can be satisfied. This reprobate was eternally beyond salvation, whether by the prayers of Mary, or of all the Martyrs, or even by the outspread wings of the Cherubim and Thrones. Yet such a hideous, justly damned man dared cry out: "I appeal the verdict!"

At such an unheard of action stars are extinguished, mountains fall into the midst of the sea, and even the face of the divine Judge of all men is hidden. And our Lord Jesus Christ asks: "To whom do you appeal my judgment?" And, in the infinite silence the damned man cries out again: "Your Justice condemns me but I appeal to your Glory!"

Thus would Bloy imply that God's glory will save the Jews, even if His justice cannot. Indeed, Bloy ventures farther and farther into the void of expressing the ineffable, proposing that where the Jews are concerned in the divine scheme of things, they might actually be identified not just with the work of the Evil One, but actually with the Holy Spirit. For Bloy often spoke of his great secret, and that secret, which usually causes gnashing of teeth amongst those of us whose heart or head is weaker than Bloy's, is that in the eternal and unfathomable mystery of God, the Evil One can be identified somehow with the Holy Spirit, the resolution of this mystery being left for final reconciliation in God's divine economy at the end of time.

So it is that Bloy stalks, without ever taking captive, the idea that the Jews/Lucifer/Holy Spirit must release Jesus from the cross that all may be saved. Ever concerned with the final end of all creation, created by God and for God, Bloy, like all great spiritual beings, sought God even in the blackest depths. Even in hell, the Psalmist sings, I shall find Thee (Psalm 139).

Surely the great genius of Bloy is found in chapter twenty-six of *Le Salut par les Juifs* where he insists upon the double manifestation of Christ in *both* Cain and Abel. Indeed, it is easy for us all to recognize the representation of Christ in the sacrificial victim, Abel. But Bloy

maintains that Cain no less than Abel also represents Christ who was *made sin* for the sake of man. We might note in passing that this idea of a saint being made sin for the sinner, dear to Bloy, was elaborately worked out by Georges Bernanos in his first novel, *Sous le soleil de Satan* (*Under the Sun of Satan*). Published by Maritain in his "Roseau d'or" series in 1926, this Bloyian element was completely excised under Maritain's influence prior to publication.⁴

For me one of Bloy's most moving passages is found in chapter nineteen where he envisages the tears of the Virgin Mother at the foot of the cross as an offering to Him who had just cried out: "I thirst!" From her heart in that hour, from her whom all generations shall call blessed, the tears of all mankind poured forth as incarnate God was mystically given to drink of the vast, immeasurable ocean of human tears. For Bloy reminds us that our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ was in that hour stripped of everything, even of His mother: He was truly *alone*. Yet in His self-willed solitude, and to quench His infinite, divine thirst, she offered Him the tears of the race of men: the tears of orphans, of adulterers, of parricides, and of the hopeless; the tears of avarice, the tears of fleshly desire; the tears of human pride. Indeed, Bloy insists, these were silver tears, tears of silver, that is, tears of *money* that, henceforth, would be the only inheritance left Israel that had cried out so shortly before that His blood be upon them and their children, and whose rejection continues until He comes down from the cross.

Bloy also insists that though there are only six words of the Virgin recorded in the Gospel, her tears at the foot of the cross in answer to her divine Son's cry, "I thirst," constitute her Seventh Word. This "Seventh Word" of her tears was answered by that truly cosmic proclamation: "It is finished." And in that ineffable moment when He commended his spirit to the Father and gave up the ghost, the veil of Judaism's temple was rent in twain, proclaiming that until the Jews believe in Him and allow Him to descend from the cross, they would never again spiritually possess anything but deserted tabernacles.

⁴See my Avant-Propos in: Georges Bernanos, *Sous le soleil de Satan*. Première édition conforme au manuscrit original. Texte établi par William Bush. Avant-propos et Notes par William Bush (Paris: Plon, 1982). See also my *Genèse et structures de Sous le soleil de Satan d'après le manuscrit Bodmer. Scrupules de Maritain et autocensure de Bernanos* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1988).

Bloy in Maritain

But let us turn to Maritain whose one single quotation taken from *Le Salut par les Juifs* in both his “*Le Mystère d’Israël*” (“*The Mystery of Israel*”)⁵ and in his *Les Juifs parmi les nations* (*The Jews Among the Nations*)⁶ is found yet another of Bloy’s great statements of genius: “Just as a dike dams up a river in order to raise its level, so does the history of the Jews dam up the history of the human race.”⁷ Farther than this, however, Maritain will never venture in the direction of *Le Salut par les Juifs*. It is easy to see why. Bloy’s work is a sort of mine field. Every step risks producing an explosion shattering our intellectual faculties or concepts. At every turn there are embarrassing contradictions that Jacques Maritain, being a philosopher, hardly cared to take on.

Perhaps too one should observe before going any farther that Maritain was part of a little household religious community of three Benedictine oblates composed of himself, his wife, and his sister-in-law, both of the latter Jews by birth. Maritain’s major texts on the Jews date moreover from the time when the Jews were being systematically persecuted as post-World War I Germany flexed her muscles under Hitler. His text, *Les Juifs parmi les nations* was a public lecture given on February 5, 1938, at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs in Paris while parts of *Le Mystère d’Israël*, published in 1937 as *L’Impossible antisémitisme*, were actually incorporated into the 1938 Ambassadeurs lecture. In these texts it was but normal therefore that he show himself extremely sensitive to the terrible injustices the Jews not only had suffered in the past, but were actually suffering at that time.

⁵“*Le Mystère d’Israël*” in Jacques Maritain, *Oeuvres Complètes (1912–1929)*, vol. 7. *Choix, présentation et notes par Henry Bars* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1975), 1026. First published in a volume entitled *Les Juifs* (Paris: Plon, 1937) under the title, “*L’impossible antisémitisme*.” this work first appeared in English in Maritain’s *Ransoming the Time* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), subsequently reprinted by the Gordian Press, New York (1969, 1972), where “*The Mystery of Israel*” is found on 141–79. Quite apart from the necessity, for the sake of accuracy, of working from the French text, which we have translated when quotations were needed, Maritain’s own notes in the Bars volume make it obvious that he did himself esteem that French text as his final one.

⁶Published in French as *Les Juifs parmi les nations* (*Jews Among the Nations*) (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1938), was translated into English and entitled *Antisemitism in England*, trans. Geoffrey Bles (London: The Centenary Press, 1939), and *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question* in the United States (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939).

⁷Bloy, *Le Salut par les Juifs*, 44; *Mystère*, 1026.

Prudently avoiding any suggestion of a solution to what he himself called “the Jewish problem,” Maritain certainly would never propose a sort of apocalyptic response such as is suggested by Bloy, whereby Jesus finally descends from the Cross when the Jews believe and the reconciliation of all things is accomplished by Lucifer’s reconciliation with the Holy Spirit.

Nonetheless Maritain maintains that the Jewish problem is “a problem *without solution*.”⁸ From the beginning of his essay, he speaks of the mystery of Israel as “a mystery belonging to a sacred order,”⁹ and not subject to normal rules. But Maritain’s argument seems weak and ineffectual when, after stating, “The tragedy of Israel is the tragedy of humanity itself,” he adds, “that’s why there is no solution to the Jewish question.” He then confuses us still further by adding:

it is the tragedy of man in his fight with the world, and of the world in its fight with God. It is Jacob, but the dreamer and the cripple, the impassioned being who exasperates the world and constitutes the world’s loudly vocal whipping-boy, intolerable yet indispensable to the world: such is the wandering Jew.¹⁰

Confusion or not, this leads the philosopher to that great parallel, dear to his heart, not only of Israel being the *elder sister* of the Christian church, but also of Israel’s still having an *equal* role to play in *contemporary* human society.

He begins with a statement of rare beauty concerning the Church.

The Church is in the world but not of the world; it is the Kingdom of God in a crucified, pilgrim state, and, as greatly as she may suffer from the world, she is still free from the world since she has already been delivered.¹¹

In contrast, Israel, according to Maritain is:

The People of God athirst for the Kingdom but who didn’t want to have anything to do with it. Israel is in the world and is not of the world; but she is riven to the world, a captive of the world, the hostage of the world.¹²

⁸Ibid., 1002.

⁹Ibid., 998.

¹⁰Ibid., 1004.

¹¹Ibid., 1005.

¹²Ibid., 1005.

From this sort of parallel there is only a step to Maritain's concluding, in a most un-Bloyian way, that Israel also is "the Mystical Body of Christ the redeemer."¹³

I would suggest that feeling uncomfortable with the apocalyptic resolution of Bloy in regard to the final mystery of Israel in the world, Maritain, as in all his other thought, whether it be political or aesthetic or even theological, prefers to limit himself to the temporal for the most part, to things of this world, to familiar *human* approaches to problems. Bloy, a much more spiritual being, was convinced that such problems were always far beyond man's scope either to understand or resolve. He therefore offered rather groping, even rough proposals, lacking anything better. That he convinced himself of the truth of some of these rough proposals is true. But then one can hardly fault him for that. Maritain, after all, was often deadly serious about his various rough ultra-humanist proposals too.

Bloy's approaches to the question were rooted in the purely spiritual, manifested in the historic revelation of God through the Jews and the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, whereas Maritain's deep-seated humanism, integral or otherwise, dominated his thought on Israel as on everything else. It was inevitable then that he tend to seek his answer through the interaction of human forces in *this* world. Indeed, to the extent that Maritain believed in progress in human history (as do, I fear, the majority of Western Christians) to that extent did Maritain inevitably tend towards modernism. At times his distinguished family's republican heritage seems quite intact in his thought, despite the obvious sincerity of his conversion to Christianity.

Parallel and Equal Roles

A fundamental desire to draw parallels between the Church and Israel is thus natural, given Maritain's approach. He seems unable even to accept that Israel still does not play a role *equal* to the role of the Church of God on earth. For even if the role of Israel be the role of disbelief in the Messiah who has manifested Himself, Maritain insists that it must somehow still be equal to the role of the Church of God.

¹³Ibid. 1009.

He goes far in sustaining this idea of equality by drawing parallels. He starts with one between the Jewish Diaspora—begun before the Christian era—and the catholicity of the Church. For if Israel be indeed a “mystical body,” marked by God, is it not then truly a church too? Still it is not, Maritain maintains, a counter-church, for just as there is no counter-God, so then can there be no counter-spouse to the Bride of Christ that is His Church. Israel then, Maritain concludes, can only be the *repudiated* Church, but never, he distinguishes, the *repudiated people*.

Passing over the idea of Christians constituting the new Israel, Maritain establishes another parallel, this time between the Christian communion of the saints and something he calls the Jews’ “communion of terrestrial Hope.”¹⁴ This “terrestrial Hope,” he states, is a virtue the Jews have in excess, but which is scarce amongst Christians.¹⁵ And if the Jews have refused the cross, the sign of hope for Christians, and cut themselves off from transfiguration, the good Jew nonetheless bears his cross unknowingly and may thereby be set on the road to Christianity, should he become conscious of it.

Maritain emphasizes how much the Jewish mind desires to possess the Absolute in this world. He understands moreover that where the thirst and hunger for the Absolute are not satisfied by God Himself, it is the illusion of the Absolute that takes over: Money.

One would think that Bloy’s thought on Money and the blood of God might influence Maritain here. If influence there be, it is slight. He does indeed refer to Bloy’s idea that Money is the blood of the poor, and even hints at Bloy’s seeing the silver of Money as “the palest and most unreal figuration of the Son of God,”¹⁶ since Gentiles as well as Jews feel its mystic attraction as an Absolute. But this remains only a hint. Never will Maritain come out and express Bloy’s idea that the blood of the poor is also the blood of God, bought for thirty pieces of silver.

Evading the heady, mystical heights of Bloy’s timelessness, Maritain scrambles back down to the plains of the temporal to speak of the role of the Jews in the modern world. Supernaturally they remain outsiders, yet they are tempted not just to be assimilated—which, as

¹⁴Ibid, 1012.

¹⁵Ibid, 1013.

¹⁶Ibid, 1019.

Maritain points out, is not a *spiritual* problem but a *social and political* one—but to become part of the establishment, to “get installed” in a temporal society. This, for the Jews, Maritain points out, does pose a spiritual problem since it betrays their vocation, which remains essentially spiritual. Indeed, once one has “gotten installed” as part of the social establishment, one’s aim is to please in this world and live in accord with the will of the Prince of this World.

A basic concept to which Maritain clings and is found in both his major texts on the Jews is that whereas the Church has been assigned the work of supernatural and supra-temporal *redemption* of the world, Israel has been assigned the work of terrestrial *activation*. By activation Maritain means leavening the lump of dough constituted by the mass of humanity, as might yeast, that is, causing it to ferment. This Jewish activation, Maritain observes, stirs up the inert human mass, it leaves it no rest, it keeps it from sleeping, it teaches it to be restless and unhappy as long as it does not have God Himself.

Georges Bernanos, who frequently launched barbs at his friend Jacques Maritain, made light of this idea of activation in one of several still-suppressed passages¹⁷ from his *Scandale de la vérité*, (*The Scandal of Truth*). Bernanos there compares the Jews’s role of “activating” history to the role of a shrewish wife in “activating” her household. Such a woman, Bernanos observes, is admirably fashioned to “activate” all sorts of things, but just do not, he pled with Maritain, try to convince her long-suffering husband that living with her has anything to do with living with some sweet angel.

Unlike the passion of the Church, Israel’s passion, Maritain says, cannot be a passion of co-redemption, making up what lacks in the passion of Christ, as Saint Paul observes in his Epistle to the Colossians. Rather is it the passion of the scapegoat on which are laid the impurities of the world, for, having stirred things up, Israel is destined to have fallen back upon herself the fruit of her “activation.”

¹⁷This passage, as are others where Bernanos attacks Maritain’s “*Les Juifs parmi les nations*,” is found in *Scandale de la vérité* as presented in the *Suite chronologique* of the *Collection Hubert Sarrazin* (Special Collections, Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, London, Canada). This unique collection, prepared by Hubert Sarrazin, the foremost authority on Bernanos’s Brazilian period, gives an annotated presentation, according to the original manuscripts, of these texts and is indispensable for following the evolution of the author’s thought between 1938 and 1945.

It is at this point that we begin to see Maritain's latent agenda. It touches both the Jews and the Church. For Maritain suddenly reminds us that Christians have not tried to bring about justice in this world. Christians have not worked sufficiently to construct social and political structures to build the temporal city where the life-giving law of Jesus Christ can save human rights and human dignity for us. Thus does this failure of the Church, Maritain argues, resemble the failure of Israel to accept the Cross.

An Eastern Orthodox View

What disturbs an Eastern Orthodox Christian, such as myself, is that Maritain is unequivocally enunciating what he sees as the goal of Christianity in this world—that is to bring about justice in this world, comparing the Church's failure to do this to Israel's failure to accept the Cross. Since experience has taught me that where the truths of God are concerned, Orthodoxy's very visible and tangible liturgical participation in the divine life is her surest defence against such intellectualism, I shall reply to Maritain's disturbing enunciation of the goal of Christianity in this world with a striking Orthodox liturgical image.

Once a year, at the beginning of Holy Week, the eternal mystical role of the Bridegroom of the Church in this world is invoked for the faithful. His icon is ceremonially brought out in the midst of the temple on Palm Sunday evening where it will remain until Holy Thursday for veneration by the faithful, reminding them that the Church's Spouse is neither the mighty judge who came to bring justice to the world, nor yet the champion of human rights and human dignity. Rather does the faithful Orthodox Christian prostrate himself with tears and kiss this icon that reveals the Bridegroom of the Church as He shall always be received by His own creation: stripped naked, flagellated, spat upon, and thorn-crowned in a cloak of mockery. Thus has the Orthodox Church, the humiliated Bride of Christ, ever been sustained in her own ongoing persecution in a world whose Prince has never been Jesus Christ. He continues to reveal Himself to her not as a judge come to establish human rights, but as the eternal, cosmic Victim, bearing the sins of the world.

Latent agendas apart, Maritain accurately concludes that racism comes from the Old Testament whereas communism, with its dream of universal brotherhood and deliverance, comes from the New. Both

however are against God, one as much as the other. With piercing accuracy Maritain remarks, "Communist atheism isn't anti-Semitic, it's quite enough for it to be universally against God."¹⁸ Both communism and racism detest all ideas of the Absolute and of transcendence.

Returning to his parallels, Maritain speaks of the reconciliation of the Synagogue and the Church. Here again Maritain's humanism as well as his inborn reticence to lean towards Bloy's apocalyptic and eschatological vision is shown through his rather shocking suggestion that the reconciliation of the Synagogue with the Church might *not*, in fact, imply the end of human history. To the contrary, it might very well inaugurate, he says, and I quote exactly: "the beginning of a new age for the Church and the world."¹⁹ While I would hesitate to accuse Maritain of any Adventist tendencies, his modernist leanings at this point do raise the hackles of an Orthodox Christian.

Finally, when Maritain speaks of Israel's eternal vocation to bear witness to the Absolute and to the presence of the supernatural throughout human history, he does stumble on something with which I believe Bloy would have been in perfect accord. Maritain maintains that only a Christian, only one who is "a member of the mystical body which is the body of the Messiah of Israel, victorious in the world"²⁰ is truly capable of evaluating the full dimensions of the tragedy of Israel. He also states, I would say with great accuracy and showing himself at his best, that the pious Jew and the pious Christian can, at one level, understand one another, for both can laugh in fraternal collusion each time they meet on that ground common to them, whether that of the Prince of this World or along the paths of the Lord.

As a literary critic I set a high value upon this latter statement of Maritain's and should like to conclude with it. It is indeed an admirable explanation of the greatness of the Book of Psalms, that literary work that I am always assuring my students is the greatest single volume known to our civilization, a book whose texts even today, in the year of the Lord, 1991, still console and nurture the souls of Christians and Jews alike, as they have done for millennia. Whether in the monastic houses of both Eastern and Western Christendom, or in

¹⁸Maritain, *Mystère*, 1024.

¹⁹Ibid., 1027.

²⁰Ibid., 1025.

Jewish rites, or in the homes of the pious Jew or Christian throughout the world, the Book of Psalms raises souls to God. Therein truly, as Maritain remarks, Christians and Jews can still meet, whether on the common ground of the Prince of this World or along the paths of the Lord. For those purely Jewish texts, for Christians, quite in addition to all they represent for Jews, have, from Christianity's beginnings also constituted a witness to the revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord God of Israel Himself in all His fullness in Jesus Christ: crucified, dead, buried, and risen from the dead.