

PART I

The Origin and Development of Maritain's Idea of the Chosen People

Bernard Doering

One of the most tragic and troublesome problems to confront the conscience of the Western world in the first half of the twentieth century was the Question of the Jew. This became for Jacques Maritain a problem of predilection that he approached with an ardent commitment and a sympathetic understanding that was shared by perhaps no other scholar of his time, particularly among Catholics. Even the positions of Léon Bloy and Paul Claudel, who gave evidence of extraordinary insights into the place of the Jew in the history of the Western world, were colored by certain lingering prejudices. The readiness of the general Catholic public in France and of a great number of the French clergy to accept without question the "facts" marshalled by Edouard Drumont in *La France Juive*, as well as the propaganda of *Action Française*, was one of the religious scandals of the century. The extent to which anti-Jewish prejudice was entrenched in many Catholic minds can be judged from the opposition encountered by the Church, even from some of the Council Fathers, during the Second Vatican Council when it attempted to repudiate the concept of a "deicide race" and to expurgate certain anti-Semitic expressions and ceremonial actions from the liturgy of Holy Week.

I would like to consider first the three people who most profoundly influenced Maritain in the formation and development of his conception of the Chosen People, the House of Israel, and of the role of this

extraordinary people in the history of the world; and secondly, the radical change in his thought that occurred between his publication of “*À propos de la Question Juive*” in 1921, and that of “*L’Impossible antisémitisme*” in 1937. Three people whom Maritain met within a period of a few years at the beginning of his career, profoundly influenced his position on the Jewish Question. In the order of their importance they were probably first, Raïssa, his wife, then Léon Bloy, his godfather, and finally Charles Péguy. (See the essays of Robert Royal and William Bush in this volume, which describe in detail Charles Péguy and Léon Bloy, respectively.)

Chronologically it was doubtless Péguy who first influenced Maritain on this question. He met Péguy in 1901 shortly before the opening of the bookshop of the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. Péguy took on the young Maritain (who was nineteen at the time) as a collaborator in the role of “*réviseur et correcteur attitré des Cahiers*” and the two men soon became very close friends.

One of the causes most ardently espoused by Péguy during the early days of their friendship was justice for the Jew. In the very first year of Maritain’s collaboration with Péguy (1901), the second series of the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* appeared in which considerable space was devoted to persecuted peoples, particularly the Jews. *Cahier* number nine of the sixth series contained a lengthy article on “*La délation aux Droits de l’Homme*,” a dossier of the Dreyfus affair and its aftermath. In July of 1910 Péguy published *Notre jeunesse*, a reply to the anti-Semitic Edouard Drumont who had taken the publication of Péguy’s *Le Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d’Arc* as a disillusioned Dreyfusard’s rejection of his former position and as a confirmation of the thesis of *La France Juive*.

It was at the bookshop of the *Cahiers* and at the Thursday *soirées* of his mother, to whom Maritain in his admiration had introduced his mentor and at which Péguy became a regular attendant, that the enthusiastic young disciple was introduced to Péguy’s position on the Jews. What the impressionable young Maritain absorbed from Péguy was a passionate zeal for justice for the Jew, considered, not as a member of the Jewish race, but as a member of the human race, with the inalienable dignity of any human person. The horror of the Dreyfus affair for Péguy was not that such an injustice had been done to a Jew, but that such an injustice had been done to any man. Dreyfus happened to be a Jew. For Péguy, his condemnation had compromised,

not only the sacredness of Christianity, but also the honor and the very salvation of France.¹

Péguy spoke on occasion of the Jews as a group. At such times, however, he did not consider the Jewish race from the point of view of its election by God for a unique spiritual destiny. When he spoke of the strange permanence of the Jewish race in the face of so many Christian attempts to wipe it out, of the tremendous cost in suffering required for its survival, of the prophetic mission of this people, he was either preparing a symbol of "that race, the only chosen one among all modern races, the French race,"² with its own mystique and its own prophetic mission in the world; or else his references to the sufferings of the Jewish race tended to denote primarily a sympathy for the suffering individual victims of injustice, who constituted the race.

I know this people well. On its skin there is no single spot that does not cause it pain, where there is not some old black and blue mark, some ancient contusion, a silent pain, the memory of a silent pain, a scar, a wound, a bruise from the East or the West. They bear their own and those of others.³

Péguy lost no love on the Jews as a race. He loved this Jew or despised that one. He did not understand the Jew; he knew and understood certain individual Jews, some of whom he loved for their spirit of poverty, their piety, their fidelity and friendship, others of whom he despised for their degrading avarice, their willingness to sell one of their own (Dreyfus) in exchange for a little peace and economic security.

What Maritain got from Péguy was a sense of justice for the Jew as an individual human being, a sense of justice unencumbered by the slightest prejudice. Insight into the peculiar vocation of the Jewish race, which he considered the fundamental reason for the social and political injustices perpetrated against the Jews, as well as his love for this unique people, Maritain would get from others.

¹Charles Péguy, *Oeuvres en prose, 1909–1914* (Paris: Éditions de la Pléiade, 1961), 645.

²Charles Péguy, "Louis de Gonzague," *Oeuvres en prose, 1889–1908* (Paris: Éditions de la Pléiade, 1959), 938.

³Péguy, *Oeuvres en prose, 1909–1914*, 549–50.

Raïssa's Influence

Maritain met Raïssa Oumançoff shortly after he had been introduced to Péguy. Born on the banks of the Don in the Russia of another epoch, she had come to Paris with her family as a very small child. Her entire education was French. Despite the secular, positivist character of this education and the fact that her pious parents, uprooted from the religious milieu of the Russian ghetto, had abandoned somewhat the public practice of the Jewish religion, she nevertheless remained profoundly attached to the religious life and the spiritual traditions of her pious Jewish ancestors, admirable, saintly ascetics, nourished on the wisdom of one Book, pious *hassidim*, radiating a sincere and simple charity. Though as a young woman she may no longer have prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, she did retain her belief in a transcendent, personal Deity.

As a poet Raïssa was endowed with a more than ordinary sensitivity that brought her an intuitive understanding of the ancient, endless sufferings of her people. Robert Rouquette calls her “a tiny individual made to suffer and to understand through sorrow.”⁴ These intuitive insights into the meaning of Judaism and the role of the Jew in history became conscious and explicit for her through the reading of Léon Bloy’s *Le Salut par les Juifs*, and particularly, wrote Raïssa, through her subsequent conversion to the Catholic faith.

This profound sensitivity to all things Jewish Madame Maritain communicated to her husband. Two years after their marriage, Maritain decided to write a life of his wife. He completed no more than the *Introduction à la vie de Raïssa* but from this short text (which he reproduced in part in his *Carnet de notes* in 1965) it is easy to see what a central role she played in his understanding of and love for the Jewish people. What began as a tribute to Raïssa ended as a lyric tribute to the Jewish race. She was for him the exemplar of the traditional virtues, the refinement and the nobility of an ancient, privileged people.

In her passion for concrete certitude, in her respect for wisdom and her love of Justice, in her unshakable good humor and her readiness to question, as in the ardor of her blood and the precision of her instinct, everywhere she carries about with her nobility and the privilege of the race from

⁴Robert Rouquette, “Filleuls de Léon Bloy,” *Etudes*, CCIX (February 1949), 201.

which she comes, of that Elder Race, to whom God entrusted Himself and who contemplated his angels, who alone is at home in heaven, alone the depository of the promise, is at home everywhere on the earth, will perish only when the world does, and who has the right to consider all other peoples as guests, but late-comers, in its patrimony, as uncultured and without a past, heirs of the Lord by adoption, not by birth . . . does anyone know how deep plunge the roots of a true Jew? We know that the true Jew is not the carnal Jew, bitter at contestation, chained to the pride of this world; do we realize fully enough that the true Jew loves Poverty and Tears, Pure of heart and Merciful, hungers and thirsts after Justice and suffers persecution and death for Justice's sake without ever surrendering? The true lineage of Abraham, an indomitable and faithful people, obedient and tenacious . . . patient and charitable men, strong and pious women, whose hope watered the miraculous Stem, worthy at last of God Himself . . .⁵

In the chapter of his *Carnet de notes* devoted to "Notre soeur Vera," he had this to say of Raïssa and her sister:

They had that same quickness of mind, that same delicate sensitivity, an almost airy perceptivity, that same sense of humor in the midst of tears which comes among the children of Israel not from the blood or the flesh, not from racial heredity, but from a kind of refinement or sharpening of nature which from the time of Abraham and Moses grace has brought about in this people and its culture. Such a quality, which is also a particular susceptibility to suffering, can easily become exacerbated in certain cases, but in others is the seal of a kind of royal dignity . . .⁶

So important, even from the point of view of the formation of his own character as a human person, did he consider this happy union of the traditions of spiritual refinement, innocence, and nostalgia for the absolute that he encountered in Raïssa and Vera, that he proclaimed himself a debtor to Israel and expressed his desire to become a Jew by adoption.

Thus I consider myself a debtor to Israel. Moreover, I do not like the vulgarity of the gentiles: I would prefer to be as little as possible a *goishe*

⁵Jacques Maritain, *Carnet de notes* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 48–49.

⁶*Ibid.*, 263.

kop, I would prefer to be a Jew by adoption, since I have already been introduced by baptism into the dignity of the children of Israel.⁷

The final words of the preceding quotation, written in 1965, concerning the fact that the spiritual life of grace in the Christian finds its origin in the ancient dignity and calling of the Chosen People, express an idea central to Maritain's thought on the Jewish Question. He was first introduced to this idea sixty years before by Léon Bloy.

Le Mendiant ingrat

The Maritains met Bloy shortly after their marriage. Moved by Maurice Maeterlink's praise of Bloy's *La Femme pauvre*, they decided to read it. They were so impressed that they wrote Bloy a letter expressing their admiration and telling him of their religious difficulties. They included a small gift to help relieve the destitution from which Bloy and his family were suffering. *Le Mendiant ingrat* was deeply touched, sent a letter of gratitude along with two of his books, and a few days later invited the Maritains to visit him. They did so on June 25, 1905. Sometime during the weeks that followed their first visit to Bloy, the Maritains came into possession of *Le Salut par les Juifs*, which Bloy had written in 1892.

They were completely overwhelmed by the book. Their ignorance of the relation of Judaism to Christianity and of Christianity itself left them totally unprepared for the shock of this revelation. Though much of what the book contained completely mystified them, they recognized immediately its obvious beauty, its startling revelation that the Jewish Question, even in its social and political aspects, was fundamentally a religious problem based on the ancient and irrevocable calling of that people. It expressed the longing for justice, truth, and charity that they felt in their own hearts. On their return to Paris they visited Bloy to discuss the book with him and to have him explain its obscure passages.⁸ In fact, Maritain considered this book so important that he decided shortly after reading it, to have it republished at his own expense as a gift to Bloy. The new edition appeared in January 1906, only five months after Maritain picked it up for the first time.

⁷Ibid., 11.

⁸Raïssa Maritain, *Les Grandes amitiés* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949), 146.

Until Bloy's death in 1925, he and Maritain saw each other frequently. At these meetings they spoke often of the Jews. Sometimes, as he mentions in his *Carnet de notes*, Maritain would submit his thoughts on the Jewish Question to Bloy for criticism; sometimes he would note down phrases from Bloy's conversation that struck him with particular force.⁹

There were many aspects of the Jewish Question on which Maritain did not agree with Bloy. He recognized the fact that, even more so perhaps than Péguy, Bloy did not really understand the Jews. He spoke of Bloy's "congenital incapacity" to judge individuals and circumstances in themselves, or to make necessary distinctions, and excused the "unrestrained excess of his violence" by saying that in reality it was "aimed at *something else*."

In his violence one must see, first of all, the effect of a very special kind of abstraction, not philosophical certainly, but artistic, or, if you will, an abstraction of typification; every event, every gesture, every individual, given *hic et nunc*, was instantaneously transposed, uprooted from its contingency, from the concrete conditions of the human environment which explain it and make it plausible, and transformed, under the terrible visionary, into a pure symbol of some devouring spiritual reality.¹⁰

Despite the book's evident shortcomings, Maritain knew that Bloy was right in calling *Le Salut par les Juifs* "the most considerable of my books" and "without any doubt, the most energetic and the most urgent Christian testimony in favor of the Elder Race, since the eleventh chapter of Saint Paul to the Romans."¹¹ The essential message of *Le Salut par les Juifs*: that the Jewish problem was fundamentally a religious problem, that this remarkable race was a people set apart, not only from every other individual people but from all other peoples taken together, that their uniqueness stemmed from their election by God for the special mission of providing the world with a Savior, that the gifts of God are without repentance, so that despite their infidelity, the Jews remain the Chosen People whose salvation is closely linked to that of the Church and that the destiny of all mankind depends in great measure on the destiny of this unique people—all of

⁹For example, see entries for 6 August 1910, 92, and 20 April 1911, 100.

¹⁰Jacques Maritain, *Quelques pages sur Léon Bloy* (Paris: François Bernouard, 1947), 14.

¹¹Léon Bloy, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: François Bernouard, 1947), vol. 1: 14.

Bloy's ideas became the guidelines of Maritain's reflections on the Jewish problem.

Bloy had couched his visionary intuitions in the mystical language of hyperbole and parable. He did not propound philosophical and theological truths through ordered rational discourse. He sought rather to procure the "sensation of mystery and its effective presence." Bloy spoke in a mystical language that made use of reason in a manner

that was more experimental than demonstrative, to express the real in the very obscurity that joins it to their feeling . . . [a mystical language which] has as its purpose to make us guess at reality as if we could touch it without speaking of it.¹²

What Maritain did was to take the truths of Bloy's revelation and, in a philosophical language that "attempts to say it without touching it," to express according to the imperfect mode of human concepts, what it is possible for us to know rationally of the mysterious problem of the Chosen People.

His whole literary effort [said Maritain of Bloy] was—while waiting for the day of vision—to project into the mirror of enigmas and similitude the rays of that substantially luminous night . . .¹³

Maritain set for himself the task of explicating these enigmas and similitude in the ordered language of rational discourse. He felt that Bloy, without being able to express it clearly, had *touched* a mystery that he himself was attempting to express without having *touched* it. Raïssa, like her godfather, most certainly *touched* this mystery, in her case through poetic experience. It would seem safe to assert that Jacques Maritain too (though perhaps in a lesser degree) *touched* the mystery in the person of his wife.

Maritain recognized that the principal merit of *Le Salut par les Juifs* was in its treatment of the Jewish Question from the only perspective from which it could be understood: the religious perspective. Bloy had re-established it on the "infinitely high" plane of theology and supernatural faith where Saint Paul had put it in his Epistle to the Romans. The Jewish Question was not a problem to be solved but a

¹²Jacques Maritain, *Quelques pages sur Léon Bloy*, 43–44.

¹³*Ibid.*, 45.

mystery to be contemplated.¹⁴ Charles Journet maintained that it was completely inane to ask if Bloy solved the Jewish problem since for him there was no solution, at least in an earthly historical sense. His mission was to cry out in the desert a divinely revealed mystery that Christianity had forgotten.¹⁵ Maritain was probably the first to heed Bloy's prophetic cry.

First Formulations

Maritain made his first public utterance on the Jewish Question in 1921 when he was asked to deliver a lecture "*À propos de la Question Juive*" at the *Semaine des Ecrivains Catholiques*.¹⁶ His debt to Bloy is unmistakable. He began by stating that the Jewish Question could be considered either from the political and social aspect or from the spiritual and theological aspect. To his brief consideration of the social and political aspects of the problem and of certain governmental measures taken to alleviate, not solve the problem, Maritain appended this footnote to the printed version of his text:

It is impossible for anyone to understand or to judge with complete justice the history of the Jews and their place in the world without taking into consideration the point of view of Revealed Truth.¹⁷

That is to say that those who consider the problem from a purely temporal, a-religious point of view, whether it be political, economic, racial, or social, miss the point entirely. Such interesting and objective, even noble and generous studies, such as the one undertaken by George Batault and mentioned by Maritain in his footnote in 1921, or Jean-Paul Sartre's *Portrait d'un antisémite* at a much later date, must necessarily remain, in the judgment of both Bloy and Maritain, fundamentally deficient.

Another way in which Maritain, in the very first of his texts on the Jews, establishes his debt to Bloy is by using the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans as proof that the Jewish problem is in truth a mystery

¹⁴Jacques Maritain, *Léon Bloy: Pages choisies par Raïssa Maritain et présentées par Jacques Maritain* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1951), 300f.

¹⁵Charles Journet, *Destinées d'Israël* (Paris: Egloff, 1943), 433.

¹⁶Published in *La Vie spirituelle*, IV (July 1921), 305–10, and republished in *La Documentation catholique*, III tome 6 (July 30-August 6, 1921), 80–82.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 305.

of supernatural origin. According to Saint Paul, however unfaithful the Jews may prove in their refusal to accept Christ as their Messiah, they remain, since the gifts of God are without repentance, the race of the prophets, of the Apostles, of the Virgin, and of Christ: they are the olive tree to which all Christians have been grafted by their baptism.

This fundamental notion of the Jewish Question is incomprehensible and incapable of explanation other than as the divine *mystery* revealed by Saint Paul is basic to everything Maritain wrote on the Jews. In 1937 he wrote that the Jewish Question could not be considered a racial problem, however much the Nazi propagandists might make use of this idea, because the Jews, strictly speaking, were not a race, whether considered biologically, nationally, or geographically.¹⁸ However, by the fact that they were all nourished by the same spiritual and moral tradition and answer to the same calling, the Jews are indeed a *people*,

the people *par excellence*, the people of God. They are a consecrated tribe; they are a *house*, the house of Israel.¹⁹

In 1939, in his reply to Marcel de Coorte's attack in the *Revue Catholique des Idées et des Faits*, on his essay "*L'Impossible antisémitisme*" Maritain wrote:

for us the Jewish Question is first and foremost (I do not say exclusively) a mystery of the theological order; and we must continue to affirm that a Christian is incapable of judging the Jewish Question either speculatively or practically unless he takes the point of view of Christian doctrine and unless he is inspired by the Christian spirit.²⁰

To consider the Jewish Question "as such," purely and simply from the natural point of view through the concrete observation of facts, independently of religion, as de Coorte had proposed, said Maritain, was to fall into the trap of *Maurrassisme*. This reference to Maurras is a very important one for an understanding of the important change in his position between 1921 and 1937, as I shall point out shortly.

In 1965 Maritain published a collection of his texts on the Jews that takes its title from the principal essay *Le Mystère d'Israël*, a slightly

¹⁸Jacques Maritain, *Questions de conscience* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1938), 55.

¹⁹Ibid., 57.

²⁰Jacques Maritain, *Raison et raisons* (Paris: Egloff, 1947), 208.

revised version of his "*L'Impossible antisémitisme*" of 1937. Of the eighteen selections chosen for inclusion in the volume, seventeen refer directly to Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which Maritain said Bloy had revealed to him in a "supernatural lightning bolt."

Maritain agreed with Bloy that no final solution to the Jewish Question could be found until the great reintegration announced by the apostle Paul. Bloy's conclusion to *Le Salut par les Juifs* and to the premise he seems to establish there of the apparently congenital sordidness of almost all the Jews seems to be that, since the condition of the Jews is willed by God, there is nothing a Christian can do either for or against the Jews. At this point Maritain went beyond Bloy by maintaining that there were practical decisions to be made and steps to be taken toward a partial and provisional solution to the Jewish Question.

In his writings on the Jews, Maritain returned again and again to a striking sentence of Bloy concerning the role of the Jew in the temporal order: "The history of the Jews dams up the history of the human race as a dike dams up a river, to raise its level." The conclusions that Maritain drew in 1921 from this conception of the Jews as a goad continually provoking society toward the realization of temporal Justice were very different from those he drew in 1937. The 1921 text proved rather embarrassing, in fact, in later years, and probably explains in part why this first of his texts on the Jewish Question was never included in his 1965 collection *Le Mystère d'Israël*. In 1921 he had written:

an essentially messianic people like the Jewish people, from the instant that it refuses the true Messiah, must play in the world a fatal role of subversion, I do not mean by reason of a preconceived plan, I mean by reason of a metaphysical necessity which makes of the Messianic hope and of the passion for absolute Justice, when they descend from the supernatural to the natural plane, and are falsely applied, the most active of revolutionary ferments.²¹

From the situation described here Maritain deduced the "evident necessity" of a struggle for the public safety against secret Judeo-masonic societies and cosmopolitan finance, as well as the necessity

²¹Jacques Maritain, "À propos de la Question Juive," *Le Mystère d'Israël* (1965), 305f.

for certain “general measures” taken by the government for the preservation of the social structure. In support of his conclusions Maritain cited an article “*La Question Juive et la révolution sociale*” written by an anti-Dreyfusard, the Marquis de la Tour du Pin and reprinted that same year in the collection *Vers un ordre social chrétien*.²²

The marquis condemned the political emancipation accorded the Jews during the French Revolution. In a series of outrageous simplifications he opposed the Jewish conspiracy to Christian society. The Jews, he said, simply obey an historic fatality in carrying out their corrosive activity against Christian society.²³ He proposed, therefore, to treat the Jews as dangerous foreigners to whom all rights of citizenship had to be refused for the good of Christian society.²⁴

It is certainly regrettable and puzzling that Maritain should have given any credit whatsoever to such anti-Semitic ideas. He did not, of course, follow completely the position of la Tour du Pin. What Maritain suggested was that with the creation of the Zionist state in Palestine the Jews be made to choose between allegiance to the country of their residence and allegiance to Palestine. If they opted for the latter they should go live in Palestine. If they opted for the country of their residence they should sever all connection with the Jewish political body and receive full rights of citizenship in the country of their choice.

In his 1921 lecture Maritain did not specify what “general measures” the government should take. Such measures, he said, were easier to determine in the days when civilization was officially Christian, but he felt that the equivalent could be found in contemporary society. This idea is certainly contrary to his conception of the new pluralist Christian society of *Humanisme intégral* (1939). Maritain was evidently ill at ease in this position for he concluded his remarks to his audience of Catholic writers with a double warning. First, it was their responsibility, he said, to enlighten public opinion to which government must have recourse for approval of its “protective measures,” and to teach the public to consider the Jewish problem without hatred, for “the passions of the masses and the pogroms have

²²Paris, 1921, 330–52.

²³Ibid., 346f.

²⁴Ibid., 347 and 213 (note 1).

never resolved a single question, indeed to the contrary." Secondly, the Jewish Question must not be permitted to misdirect the social unrest and disillusionment of the day toward the Jews as the *unique* cause of the evils from which society was suffering.

Whether it is a question of ideas, of men or of institutions, there are others that are guilty, and in particular it would be too easy for us to beat our own guilt on the breast of Israel, forgetting that the failings and infidelities of Christians hold first rank among the causes of the present universal disorder.²⁵

If Maritain's remarks about governmental protective measures and their contemporary justification seem to echo for a brief moment Bloy's medieval attitude toward the Jews, they certainly appear to be at variance with Péguy's stand for complete recognition of political rights for Jews.

"Official" Catholic Views

The incompatibility between Maritain's position on the political and social aspects of the Jewish Question in 1921 position, I think, reflects the intellectual confusion resulting from his efforts to bring his social and political thought into line with what his spiritual director Father Clérissac, and later Father Garrigou-Lagrange, seem temporarily to have convinced him was the official position of the Catholic Church on political and social matters. When he converted to the Catholic faith, Maritain had, as he wrote to Jean Cocteau, turned himself inside-out like a glove. He accepted fully the teachings and traditions of the Church on the spiritual life and he submitted to the traditional practice of "spiritual direction" in which complete submission and obedience to the spiritual director was urged upon the aspirant to the spiritual life, because even though, "strictly speaking [his] director may be mistaken, . . . [he] makes no mistake in obeying him, except, of course, were he to give counsel opposed to faith or morals."²⁶ Maritain submitted to the urging of Father Clérissac, though with some reservations, and became associated with *Action Française*, an ultra-conservative political movement with definite Fascist tendencies,

²⁵"À propos de la Question Juive," 307.

²⁶Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life* (Tournai: Desclée de Brouwer, 1923), 269.

which published a daily newspaper of the same name in which there was a daily column filled with the most virulent type of anti-Semitism. Maritain, very uneasy in this association, gradually distanced himself from the movement and when it was condemned by the Vatican in 1926, he publicly supported the condemnation. “*À propos de la Question Juive*” was written during the time of this anomalous and embarrassing association with Maurras’s movement and with Massis’s *Parti de l’intelligence*.

“*L’Impossible antisémitisme*” was written during the time when Maritain was steadfastly disobeying his spiritual director Father Garrigou-Lagrange who had ordered him to confine his writing to philosophy and make no public statements on the Spanish Civil War. Later, whenever Maritain or Raïssa referred to this association, one finds expressions of self-reproach for their “ignorance of the limits of spiritual direction,” for their “untimely docility,” their “undue obedience,” their “unpardonable thoughtlessness,” “inadvertedness,” “naïveté and lack of consideration,” and for their uncritical readiness “to make obligatory for themselves what went against their very inclination.”²⁷ It is significant that at the same time that Maritain was reproaching himself for this regrettable association, he was openly apologetic for certain of his utterances on the Jewish Question in 1921. In 1961 he spoke of “a kind of inattention and brutal simplification due to the coarseness of heart that persists in Gentiles, even those converted (Alas, I am one of them, I know where I stand in this respect).”²⁸ He was undoubtedly referring to his 1921 article when he stated in a note to the *Avant-propos* of his 1965 collection *Le Mystère d’Israël* that he was forced to omit certain texts “treating the same subject and writings from times far different from our own, for a different public.”

Long before 1937 Maritain no longer considered certain ideas expressed in 1921 as representative of his position. Already in “*À propos de la Question Juive*” itself, in his second warning to Catholic writers, which was quoted above, concerning responsibility for the evils of modern society, Maritain’s words “whether there is question of ideas, of men or of institutions” reflect Maritain’s basic incompatibility, even

²⁷See especially Raïssa Maritain, *Les Grandes amitiés*, 401–11 *passim*, and Henri Massis, *Maurras et notre temps* (Paris: La Palatine, 1951), 166–69 *passim*.

²⁸From the preface Maritain wrote for the book by Henry Bars, *La Politique selon Jacques Maritain* (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrieres, 1961), 9.

then, with the position of *Action Française* on the Jewish Question, particularly from the point of Jewish participation in revolutionary movements. The idea that institutions and ideas, as well as men, need reform is itself a revolutionary concept. Maritain developed this though more explicitly and more fully in the years that followed until their full expression in *Humanisme intégral* drew the concentrated fire of Paul Claudel.²⁹ As early as 1926, even before his public denunciation of *Action Française*, Maritain protested in his *Réponse à Jean Cocteau* against certain young “*bien-pensants*” who expressed their contempt for a Jewish political figure by shouting “*Abraham! hou! hou!*” According to Maritain they outraged heaven by smearing the name of a great saint whose paternity embraces all Christians; and he added immediately that it was the duty of Christians to look to the Jews as an example of the social unrest that should give impetus to Christians to undertake the necessary reform of institutions. He added:

It is on them that we are grafted. How could we be inattentive to the winds that pass over the old trunk. We must follow with much love, vigilance and respect, the anxiety that troubles Jewish young people.³⁰

In 1937 Maritain published his “*L’Impossible antisémitisme*” in the collection *Les Juifs*.³¹ In the essay he repudiated completely the doctrine of those who, like la Tour du Pin, claimed that “the Jews are united as one man in a plot to morally corrupt and politically subvert Christianity.”³² He renounced his own contention of 1921 that the Jews should be the object of special restrictive legislation to prevent such subversive purposes. He went on to claim that restrictive legislation modeled on the Middle Ages was inapplicable, even in modified form, and completely incongruous in the pluralist society he described in his *Humanisme intégral*.

²⁹In one of his *billets* to *Temps Présent* (11 March 1938) concerning the causes of the Spanish Civil War, François Mauriac quoted Maritain’s *Humanisme intégral*: “As long as modern society secretes poverty as the product of its normal functioning there can be no rest for the Christian.” These words occasioned Claudel’s attack in *Le Figaro*. Maritain replied in a letter to the editor and the controversy developed in a series of letters and articles until Maritain brought it to an end with “*Les points sur les ‘i’*” in *Temps Présent* (14 July 1939). For an extended account of this controversy see my book *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 117–24.

³⁰Jacques Maritain, *Réponse à Jean Cocteau* (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1926), 46f.

³¹*Les Juifs*, ed. Daniel Rops (Paris: Plon, 1937).

³²Jacques Maritain, *Questions de conscience*, 59.

Jewish Restlessness

In 1937 Maritain developed further the thought he had expressed in his *Réponse à Jean Cocteau* eleven years before, that in the social sphere the Christian should emulate the “*inquiétude stimulatrice*” (the stimulating restlessness) of the Jew. If the Jew seems to have an excess of the earthly hope that leads to personal commitment in the struggle to achieve the reign of absolute Justice, the average Christian has far too little of it. Thus in the history of the world the Jew plays the role of a stimulus, a goad.

In regard to what touches *indirectly* on the salvation of the world, [the Jewish people] obeys a calling on which, in my opinion, we should insist above all else and which gives the clue to many an enigma. While the Church is assigned to the work of the supernatural and supratemporal redemption of the world, Israel is assigned, in the order of temporal history and its proper ends, to the work of *terrestrial activation* of the mass of the world. Though it is not of the world, Israel is there to irritate it, to exasperate it, to *move* it. As a foreign body, as an activating ferment introduced in the mass, it will not leave the world at rest; it prevents it from sleeping, it teaches the world to be discontented and restless as long as it does not possess God; it stimulates the movement of history.³³

In the same collection in which Maritain’s “*L’Impossible antisémitisme*” appeared, Daniel-Rops, the editor, published three letters by Paul Claudel on the Jewish Question, one of which points out the single aspect of this problem on which he and Maritain were at considerable variance: the historical role of the Jewish “*Inquiétude stimulatrice*.” For Bloy and for Maritain this “stimulating restlessness” that raised the level of civilization was an element of the divine calling of the Jews; Claudel found Jewish involvement in modern social unrest completely negative, subversive, and destructive.

In the first of his letters Claudel denounced the Nazi persecutions of the Jewish people, “that unshakable rock,” which, “with an heroic courage and intellectual boldness that would be inexplicable without a vocation from on high . . . had always maintained . . . the idea of a personal and transcendent God. . . .” Claudel’s careful and loving

³³Ibid., 65.

study of the Bible freed him from the prejudices rampant among so many Catholics of his time, particularly those of his own political persuasion. Even on questions of the social evils that pressed on society, he refused to go along with the Right Wing, which, in most cases, attributed them wholly or in great part to the machinations of the Jews. If there were evils in the world, he claimed, the Gentiles were far more responsible for them than the Jews. He agreed with Maritain on many other points: the impossibility for the Jew to find complete assimilation, the rejection of Jewish responsibility for the death of God, the exalted vocation of Israel to supply the Redeemer, the Jewish preoccupation with the reign of temporal justice.³⁴

Disagreements with Claudel

Claudel's second letter, however, shows clearly the point of his disagreement with Maritain. If there are evils in society, claimed Claudel, they had to be cured by the reform of individuals, not by social revolution or the reform of institutions. The structure of society had to remain intact. In *Figures et paraboles* he had written: "A man cannot be innocent if he is against the Public Order."³⁵ He refused to admit with Maritain that the Jews had a vocation to "stimulate" the reform of political and social institutions through their thirst for absolute Justice. Claudel claimed that Jews who pursued such a vocation in society were simply receiving their comeuppance in the persecution society inflicted on them, as it had a right to inflict on any deluded, meddling Humanist:

[I]t is a fact that Jews can be found everywhere in the front ranks of the parties of social and religious subversion. Besides, may it not be that in this destructive role they are obeying a kind of providential vocation? But it's not surprising then that this brings about certain reactions.

On the other hand it is surprising to see so much intelligence, such a spirit of generosity and sacrifice, such a vivid sense of spiritual matters, gathered together around something dead and petrified. One would be tempted to say that the Jews no longer read their Scriptures or that they read them without understanding. When I lived in America, from time to

³⁴Cf. in Claudel's play *Le Père humilié* (Paris: NRF, 1920), 63–67, the reply of the young Jewish girl, Pensée, to the question of Orian about her blindness.

³⁵Jacques Maritain, *Figures et paraboles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), 50.

time I came upon sermons of rabbis. It was the same disgusting hog-wash that flows inexhaustibly from Protestant books.

“How the gold has been tarnished! How its excellent color has been changed!”

It is sad to see a son of Israel who can no longer be distinguished from a Baptist or a Methodist.

Claudé added this postscript at the end of his letter:

P.S.—There is another text that I cannot reproduce except in Latin: *Qui nutriebantur in croceis amplexa sunt stercora*. This last word seems to apply exactly to this disgusting humanism which instead of being attracted to man himself, appreciates nothing but his offal.³⁶

Bloy had revealed to Maritain that anti-Semitic prejudice against the people whom Raïssa had taught her husband to love and honor was fundamentally a religious problem. For very many Catholics, and Christians in general, political and social considerations were no more than a pretext to vent their deep-seated resentment against what they considered a collectively and eternally guilty “deicide race.” On the other hand, like Péguy, Maritain recognized the importance of the political aspects of the problem. He knew that for some Christians, like Claudé, who had freed themselves of the traditional religious prejudices, the social and political aspects of the Jewish Question became the pretext for a selective prejudice and persecution. Maritain continued his struggle against anti-Semitism on both fronts, and is responsible, as much as any other Catholic, for the proclamations on the Jews by Vatican II, though he was indeed profoundly disappointed in the council’s final declarations on anti-Semitism, which had been watered down for political considerations. Despite the shortcomings of the final text of the council, the declaration on the Jews represented a giant step forward and a victory of the position Maritain had been in a large measure responsible for founding. Louis Chaigne finds it to Maritain’s honor that the position on the Jews finally promulgated by the Church in its effort at *aggiornamento* was all found in the pages of books and articles written by Maritain forty years

³⁶For the “prurient” reader let me furnish an English translation of the text that Claudé’s delicate modesty forbade him to reproduce in the vernacular, “They that were brought up in scarlet have embraced the dung,” from *Lamentations*, 4, 5.

before, in a political and spiritual climate entirely different from our own, and before the abominable crimes of the Nazis.³⁷ His relentless opposition to the errors of racism and his courageous attack on its unspeakable crimes against humanity rank among the noblest deeds of Jacques Maritain.³⁸

³⁷Louis Chaigne, *Les Lettres contemporaines* (Paris: del Duca, 1964) 148, footnote 5.

³⁸Donald A. Gallagher, *The Achievement of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, A Bibliography, 1906–1961* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), 21.