

Maritain and the Jews

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Shall we look for the deepest impulse toward that monstrosity—Christians who are anti-Semites? They are seeking an alibi for their innermost sense of guilt, for the death of Christ of which they want to clear themselves: but if Christ did not die for their sins, then they flee from the mercy of Christ! In reality they want not to be redeemed. Here is the most secret and vicious root by virtue of which anti-Semitism dechristianizes Christians, and leads them to paganism.

—Jacques Maritain

Anti-Israelism is no better than anti-Semitism.

—Jacques Maritain

Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), the French Roman Catholic philosopher, once wrote: “It seems to me very significant that these two events of such great bearing—on the Jewish side the return of a portion of the people to the Promised Land, on the Christian side the Second Council of the Vatican—took place at almost the same time, the first in 1948, the second in 1962–1965. They mark, each in its own way, a reorientation of history.”¹ This is a stunning statement: a pivoting of all of human history on its axis. Maritain went even further. “What is more important than the insistence of the council upon the friendship to be developed and to be consolidated between Jews and Christians?”² What is more important, indeed?

¹Jacques Maritain, *On the Church of Christ*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 174.

²Ibid.

In these days of rampant atheism and relativism among critical elites in Western societies, of genteel nihilism and “liberal irony” (Richard Rorty), both Judaism and Christianity are slated for destruction. Rorty’s claim, widely shared, that there is only “contingency all the way down” takes direct aim at the law of God. It denies the existence of the One God. Similarly, those earlier versions of liberal rationalism, whose foundation was a naive universalism, have also undercut Judaism and Christianity, which represent the scandal of particularity. The self-congratulatory “tolerance” of the rationalists extends its soothing warmth only to those who have nothing disturbing to say. Faced with any suggestion of a claim to truth, law, right and wrong, or (God forbid) the absolute, the hairs on the necks of the forces of “tolerance” bristle. They cannot abide the universal vision of Judaism and Christianity that, by contrast, goes by the way of the particular. Liberal rationalism and Judaism/Christianity are at loggerheads.

Maritain understood this. He understood the history of Judaism as a mystery linked to the fate of the entire world. For Judaism in his eyes is linked to the eternal love of God for His chosen people, a love unrepented of and faithful to the end of time. Maritain read all of history in the light of this mystery, including in his later writings the existence of the new state of Israel. As he wrote in *Le Mystère d’Israël* (1965) and repeated later in *On the Church of Christ* (1970), it is a strange paradox to see in dispute “the sole territory to which, considering the entire spectacle of human history, it is absolutely, divinely certain that a people has incontestably a right: for the people of Israel is the sole people in the world to whom a land, the land of Canaan, was given by the true God, the unique and transcendent God, creator of the universe and of the human race. And what God has given once is given forever.”³

Maritain understood that Israel is not a state by divine right. It is “only a State like all others.” He said:

the return of a portion of the Jewish people and its regroupment in the Holy Land (of which the existence of this State is the sign and the guarantee)—this is the reaccomplishment, under our eyes, of the divine promise which is without repentance. In short [in my first writings on this subject] I

³Ibid., 170.

remembered what was said to Abraham, to Jacob and to Moses, and what Ezekiel announced: not that I regarded the founding of the State of Israel as a kind of preface to the realization of this prophecy (about this I know absolutely nothing, though it is possible); but in order to keep in my mind respect for the ways of God.⁴

The Tension of Separate Vocations

“The mystery of Israel”—that was one of Maritain’s favorite themes, to which he returned in at least three essays of varying length.⁵ During 1938, he wrote a short book, a manifesto really, under the urgency of Hitler’s virulent anti-Semitism, *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question* (1939).⁶ He later devoted a number of chapters and essays to such themes as: “The Destiny of the Jewish People” (in *On the Philosophy of History*, 1957);⁷ “Judaism” and “The Iniquitous Lot Inflicted on Jews in Christendom” (in *On the Church of Christ*, 1970);⁸ and “The Christian Meaning of the Story of the Crucifixion” (*Jewish Frontier*, 1944, reprinted in *The Range of Reason*, 1952).⁹ He often expressed his joy that there were many strong and powerful friendships forged in France between Catholics such as Léon Bloy, Charles Péguy, Yves R. Simon, Paul Claudel, Georges Rouault, and Sigrid Undset with Jewish writers and artists such as Henri Bergson, Paul Landsberg, Manu and Babet Jacob, Benjamin Fondane, and many others.

Maritain held that Jews are “not only a people, but a people endowed with a mystery which pertained to the very order of the redemption of mankind.” The Jews form, “analogically, a kind of Mystical Body.” In his view, “after its lapse” in not recognizing in Jesus the Messiah, Judaism no longer has an “ecclesial” mission as the church of all humankind. But “its mission continues . . . because it cannot help

⁴Ibid., 170–71.

⁵Jacques Maritain, *The Living Thoughts of Saint Paul*, 2d ed (London: Cassell, 1945), Chapter IV, “The Mystery of Israel,” 67–75; Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), Chapter VI, “The Mystery of Israel,” 141–76; for a slightly different version see Evans and Ward, eds., *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 195–216.

⁶Jacques Maritain, *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1939).

⁷Jacques Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History*, ed. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957), 85–93.

⁸Maritain, *On the Church of Christ*, 119–21, 157–75.

⁹Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), 129–33.

being the chosen people, for the gifts of God are without repentance, and the Jews are still beloved because of their fathers.” To the Catholic Church has been assigned, by contrast, “the task of the supernatural and supra-temporal saving of the world,” but “to Israel [is] assigned, in the order of temporal history and its own finalities, the work of the *earthly leavening* of the world.” The continued vitality of Judaism is necessary to the vitality of the world.

Maritain gave the lecture that later became the book, *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question*, at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs in Paris on February 5, 1938, and then in English at the Cosmopolitan Club in New York City on December 14, 1938, under the auspices of the National Conference of Jews and Christians. This book was published in Paris and in New York in 1939, just as the firing started in Poland. Soon thereafter, France fell, and Maritain became unwilling to live in Vichy, France. In that contrast, Maritain tried to plumb the depths of anti-Semitism, beginning with obvious points such as the following:

“The Jews”—it is very natural for a man, especially some literary man or businessman on whom one or two Jews have played a shabby trick, or who has noticed among the large number of questionable personalities which life has placed upon his path, a few with Semitic profiles among the many unclassifiable—it is so natural for a man to say, not “a Jew,” or “three Jews,” or “ten Jews” with whom I have had dealings are this or that, but “the Jews” (of whom there are 16 million in the world), “the Jews” are this or that. It is so natural,—but it is hardly rational.¹⁰

Maritain writes scathingly of the anti-Semitic lies spreading through Europe in 1938, denounces as the “most impudent of forgeries” the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and examines the exposed and precarious condition of the Jewish population in each of the several countries of Europe.

Israel, Maritain holds, intending by this name not the present state of Israel but the Jewish people as a whole, is “a witness to the Scriptures,” holding the Bible before the eyes of the world. More than that, this Israel

is to be found at the very heart of the world’s structure, stimulating it, exasperating it, moving it. Like an alien body, like an activating ferment

¹⁰Maritain, *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question*, 7.

injected into the mass, it gives the world no peace, it bars slumber, it teaches the world to be discontented and restless as long as the world has not God, it stimulates the movement of history.¹¹

This is what the world will not forgive. Judaism speaks to the world of a transcendent order, of the supernatural, of mystery, of judgment. "If the world hates the Jews . . . it is because the world detests their passion for the absolute and the unbearable stimulus which it inflicts. It is the vocation of Israel which the world execrates." And here, too, there is a parallel: "Thus hatred of Jews and hatred of Christians spring from a common source, from the same recalcitrance of the world, which desires to be wounded neither with the wounds of Adam nor with the wounds of the Savior, neither by the goad of Israel for its movement in time, nor by the cross of Jesus for eternal life."¹²

The drama of love between the Jewish people and God is eternal; it will last in history until the reconciliation of the Synagogue and the Church. So the tension of separate vocations in the world, one of the Synagogue, the other of the Church, will continue indefinitely, as will the tension of the Jewish people with the nations. Maritain quotes Léon Bloy: "The history of the Jews thwarts the history of the human race as a dike thwarts the flood, to raise its level."¹³ The Christian can only respond with reverence for the people God has chosen to love. "Notice that Abraham is called our Patriarch, our ancestor," Pope Pius XI said in September 1938, as Maritain gladly notes. "Anti-Semitism is . . . a movement in which we Christians can have no part whatsoever . . . Anti-Semitism is unacceptable. Spiritually we are Semites."¹⁴

Anti-Semitism and Anti-Christianity

"*Spiritually we are Semites,*" Maritain loves to repeat. How can we not love those whom God so loves, in whose midst we have luckily been chosen to mingle?

[F]rom the Catholic viewpoint, anti-Semitism, if it spreads among those calling themselves disciples of Jesus Christ, seems to be a pathological phenomenon which indicates the deterioration of Christian conscience

¹¹Ibid., 29.

¹²Ibid., 29–30.

¹³Quoted in *ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴Quoted in *ibid.*, 41.

when it becomes incapable of accepting its own historic responsibilities and of remaining existentially faithful to the high exigencies of Christian truth.

[F]or a Christian to hate or to despise or to wish to treat degradingly the race from which sprung his God and the Immaculate Mother of his God [is self-destructive. . . . and] the bitter zeal of anti-Semitism always turns in the end into a bitter zeal against Christianity itself.¹⁵

The man who more than any other brought Maritain into the Catholic faith was the self-described “pilgrim of the absolute,” the mendicant layman and writer Léon Bloy, author of the searing novel *The Woman Who Was Poor*. Maritain cites this powerful text from Bloy:

Imagine that people about you were to speak continually of your father and your mother with the greatest contempt, and to have for them only insults or outrageous sarcasm. What would be your sentiments? Well, that is exactly what is happening to Our Lord Jesus Christ. We forget, or rather we do not wish to know, that as a man Our Lord was a Jew, the epitomé par excellence of the Jewish nature, the Lion of Judah; that His Mother was a Jewess, the flower of the Jewish race; that the apostles were Jews, along with all the prophets; finally, that our whole liturgy is based on Jewish books. How, then, express the enormity of the outrage and the blasphemy involved in vilifying the Jewish race?¹⁶

Thus, in Catholic eyes, anti-Semitism is a sin against God’s people, and those who commit this sin condemn themselves trebly. In the same measure as they condemn the Jews for infidelity to God, they incur guilt for their own infidelity. To which they add the guilt of mean hypocrisy. They are, further, asking God not “to forgive as we have forgiven,” but to damn us as we have damned others. Woe be to anti-Semites! Among Christians there is scarcely a worse sin, except blasphemy. Anti-Semitism runs deeper than mere bias or discrimination or racism or xenophobia. For a Christian, it is a sin against God’s own beloved people, a sin against the foundation of his own faith, a kind of suicide.

The debt Catholics owe to Jacques Maritain for his reflections on Judaism is enormous. As teacher to a whole generation of bishops

¹⁵Ibid., 41–42.

¹⁶Quoted in *ibid.*, 42–43.

and theologians, his contribution to the statement of Vatican II on the Jews was significant, perhaps philosophically indispensable. Maritain saw that the validity of the Jewish vocation under God is forever; that God's Covenant with the Jews is unbreakable; and that the friendship between Christians and Jews is an obligation springing directly from the vocation of both as vessels of God's inscrutable love.

Maritain, Jews, and America

Maritain's writings were a special blessing for the Catholics of the United States. For he, more than anyone, has helped us to explain to ourselves why we have so much respect, even love, for Jews and that it has been our good fortune to meet them in daily life. Our fellow Jewish citizens are admirable in so many obvious ways; often so generous to us; and reliable friends in time of trial or trouble. The kinship runs deep. And, as if with a smile of recognition, Maritain writes:

If it is true, as Psichari dared to say, that God prefers sin to stupidity, then His liking for the Jews (and for some others) becomes understandable. One is never bored with a Jew. Their nostalgia, their energy, the naïveté of their finesse, their ingenuity, their knowledge of penury are all rare tonics for the mind. I remember with what joy, in a large city of the United States, after lectures and university gatherings, I, who am a *goy*, would go to the home of Jewish friends to refresh myself in the vitality of that tireless pathos and the perpetual motion of ideas which vivified for me long centuries of painful refining of the soul and the intelligence.¹⁷

Just the same, in writing about the Jews, Maritain made quite clear that he was writing as a Christian. If any Jews happen to read his words, he warned, they would find that he writes about Jews as a Christian and from within a framework established by Christian conceptions. They would not, he thinks, expect anything else.¹⁸ At times, this habit of mind and expression seemed to violate the American custom of "giving no offense." So resolutely does Maritain write from within a Christian point of view that, if one puts oneself into the shoes of one's Jewish friends, one might find his words implying the inferiority of Judaism to Christianity, and the need of Judaism

¹⁷Evans and Ward, *Social and Political Philosophy*, 208.

¹⁸Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 141-45.

to be reconciled, eventually, with Christianity. This, of course, is the exact point of tension between Christianity and Judaism. Both share an astonishing number of convictions, aims, expectations, perspectives, and criteria of goodness. It is hard to exaggerate how much they have in common. But on the crucial point of who Jesus is, and what he signifies, there is a radical difference.

Thus, the Jewish interpretation of Christianity is at odds with the Christian interpretation of Judaism. Of this there is no doubt. Still, to assert that each must deny certain claims of the other and let these mutual denials dominate attention, is to go too far. It is wrong to allow the sharp and central point of difference between Christianity and Judaism to obscure all that they share in common. It is wrong not to walk together as far as possible, on the excuse that at one crucial point there is a clear difference. For neither in Jewish nor in Christian thought is it held that this difference must last for all eternity, or even for the entire duration of temporal history.

Asymmetry of Perspectives

Perhaps the best way of clarifying this element is to point out the asymmetry, abstractly considered, between the way in which Judaism regards Christianity and the way in which Christianity regards Judaism. The asymmetry consists in this: Christianity is not intelligible without Judaism; but Judaism, although it is not intelligible without the Messiah, is intelligible (from a Jewish point of view) without Christianity. Since there have been false prophets and false Messiahs, it is no contradiction of Jewish thought to conclude that Jesus, however admirable in many ways, was not the Messiah. From a Jewish point of view, Christians are in error. In this sense, Jews can understand Judaism without reference to Christianity. But Christian self-understanding necessarily includes its relation to the whole of Jewish history, not only in the times of the patriarchs and prophets before the coming of Christ, but also afterwards.

Indeed, so true is this latter point that Christians may regard as excessive the prospect that Christianity should replace Judaism wholly, as if it would be good for Christianity for Judaism simply to disappear, subsumed within Christianity. Christianity does not displace Judaism as a heavy boat displaces water. On the contrary, Christianity needs a vital and living Judaism, in the concrete world of history as it is, in order to help it to understand its own inheritance. For many of the

foundations and preconceptions and starting places of Christian life have been, and still are, protected and nourished in a vital Judaism. This witness of Judaism is concretely indispensable to keeping the Jewish tradition alive also within Christianity itself.

To be a Christian is in an important sense to be not only “spiritually a Semite,” but also to be a Jew. A great many of the prerogatives of the Christian faith belong first of all to the Jews. Many of the elements basic to a Christian way of life were first basic to a Jewish way of life: a reverence for the Scriptures; a sense of the sacred; respect for the law; humility before the transcendent; the cherishing of the human capacity for reflection and choice; the sharp taste of the existing (as distinct from nonexistent), and of being (as opposed to nonbeing), and therefore of the blessed contingency of this created world; the practice of compassion; the ideal of friendship with God and of “walking with God”; the habit of prayer; and a sense of the presence of God during the activities of every day—all these are habits of life that Christians share with Jews and have learned from Judaism. Before he was an exemplar for the imitation of Christians, Jesus was an exemplar of those who follow the law, the prophets, and the mandates of Jewish daily life.

Thus, in order to interpret many of the basic concepts of the Christian testament, Christians need a living witness of the practice of these concepts in a living community of Jews. In this sense, the Jewish community of our time plays for Christianity an indispensable role. Even in an ideal world, in which Judaism and Christianity will have become one, it would be necessary for those who lived closer to the Christian spectrum of this community to be grounded in, held in balance by, and inspired by those who live closer to the Jewish spectrum of this one community. But that is to speak of the ideal.

In the real world of tangled history, tension, misunderstanding and even conflict, the Christian must necessarily be conscious of how much he owes to Judaism, simply to be a good Christian. By contrast, it is at least psychologically possible for a Jew, while respecting Christianity, not only to reject it as a “fulfillment” of Judaism, but also to conceive of Judaism in terms that seem to him, at least, not to depend on the history of Christianity. This point requires clarification.

Mutual Dependence?

For this independence may not be, in actual history, as thorough as it seems in abstract statement. Historical research seems to show that

there are significant discontinuities between the Judaism of the pre-Christian era and the Judaism of today. More to the point, in the period between the dispersion of the Jews from Jerusalem and today, the historical Jewish community developed some of its own conceptions, practices, and self-understandings in the face of questions posed by the growing power and prestige of Christianity. It would have been surprising, indeed, if the rabbis of the first millennium after Christ did not face questions for Judaism arising from the surrounding phenomena of Christianity. It would have been surprising if the forms of Christian theology that developed between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries A.D. did not influence the questions and methods of Jewish scholars, as those of the latter certainly influenced Christian scholars. When one speaks of the concrete world of history as it is, rather than of Judaism and Christianity as abstractions, the picture necessarily grows in complexity and its colorations in subtlety.

Nonetheless, a Christian trying to place himself in the shoes of his Jewish friends, at least as our experience in America allows us to do so, can dimly begin to imagine why, to a Jew, Christianity does not *seem* like a religion of the true Messiah awaited by Judaism for so many ages. In the medieval period, the first attempt by Christians to imagine a Christian culture, as Maritain points out, was to imagine it as a *sacral* culture, one in which the intermixing of sacred and profane, eternal and temporal, church and state, was carried out in a direct and naive way, a way that posed grave dangers to both sides of each couplet. Such an attempt must have seemed like common sense. It still appeals to a certain, although diminishing, number of Christians. In such a civilization, the self-understanding of Christianity was given public (and now embarrassing) dramatization. Thus, on the vigil of Easter, the president of the Jewish community at Toulouse would be brought before the Count of Toulouse to receive a ritual slap.¹⁹

In public and visible ways, Jews were subjected to second-class status and limited in what they could do. They were often humiliated. Far worse still, a lethal and deadly anti-Semitism was allowed to fester and at times to break forth in displays of passionate and horrible violence. From all this history, which Maritain portrays in vivid detail, despite his restraint and softened manner of exposition, how does one

¹⁹Maritain, *On the Church of Christ*, 165.

find evidence of the hand of the true Messiah? The terrible betrayals by which Christianity is unfaithful to itself are doubly sinful, both in themselves and because of the darkness of mind and antipathy to which they give rise regarding the true calling of Christianity.

In this regard, Maritain uses a particularly compelling example. Those who accuse the Jews of being “Christ-killers,” seem to be desirous above all of hiding from themselves the fact that it was their own sins that killed Christ, that Christ died particularly for their sins, and thus in a highly personal way became their redeemer. In trying falsely to divert attention to the Jews, they undercut their own redemption.²⁰ In their attempt to hide from their own sinfulness, they double their guilt. Thus, it is quite wrong to say that anti-Semitism is a natural fruit of Christianity. On the contrary, in all its forms and in each of its devious paths, anti-Semitism is a radical denial of Christianity. Its real motive is a kind of “christophobia.”²¹ Anti-Semitism is a refusal to face one’s own sins and to accept one’s own redemption. It is also a radical affront both to the God of Christianity and to the God of Judaism—Who is one and the same God.

Paul and Jewish Prerogatives

At one point, Maritain, following Saint Paul, adds up the ten prerogatives of Judaism. They form a list before which the human soul can only lower its head in awe. For the Christian, the existence of Judaism casts light on the core identity of the human race. The Jews lie closer to the heart of the nature and destiny of human beings than any other people. They are a chosen people. These are among their prerogatives: First to receive the deposit of the Scriptures, Israel received directly the Word of God. It is the first biblical people.

Following Saint Paul, Maritain enumerates nine other prerogatives of the Jewish people. To them are given the name of Israel, God’s well beloved, and they are the first and unforgettable people of God. To them was made manifest the glory, the *schechina*, that “supernatural brilliance in which the Ark and the Temple were at times enveloped.” To them belong the repeated Covenants entered into between God and his people. To them belong the Torah, “established by the angels and

²⁰Maritain, *Range of Reason*, 132.

²¹Evans and Ward, *Social and Political Philosophy*, 216.

published by Moses in the midst of the lightnings of Sinai.” To them came also the revealed form of the proper worship of the One God; and the Messianic promises; and the Patriarchs. And tenth, among them was born the Christ, “of the lineage of Abraham and of the blood of David” and “at the same time Sovereign Lord of the ages.”²²

As Maritain writes, he had never quite so clearly grasped the centrality of the Jews to human history until he reread, and meditated closely on, Saint Paul. “Saint Paul has been especially commissioned to convey to us the enlightenment of divine inspiration, the views of our God on that subject,” the place of the Jewish people in history. “It is a shame that so many Christians do not know the statements of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Never did I realize how acutely the essentially anti-Christian madness of anti-Semitism as when preparing a book on Saint Paul and gathering together his texts on the mystery of Israel.”²³

In the generation of Catholics for whom Maritain was writing, a sharp distinction was made between a “problem” and a “mystery.” The term problem came out of the discourse of science and a this-worldly pragmatism. It suggests that something is awry, out of kilter, not yet rationally disposed, for which it is imperative to find a “solution.” With considerable energy, Maritain opposed this way of thinking about the Jewish people. “To wish to find, in the pure, simple, decisive sense of the word, a *solution* of the problem of Israel, is to attempt to stop the movement of history.”²⁴ On the contrary, to review the history of the Jewish people is to be prompted to wonder. The concept “mystery” is intended to capture this. Of problems the human mind is master; but in the presence of mystery, no matter how far it pushes the boundaries of its knowledge, it encounters its own inadequacy.

Israel is a mystery. Of the same order as the mystery of the world or the mystery of the Church. Like them, it lies at the heart of redemption. A philosophy of history, aware of theology, can attempt to reach some knowledge of this mystery, but the mystery will surpass that knowledge in all directions. Our ideas and our consciousness can be immersed in such things; they cannot circumscribe them.²⁵

²²Maritain, *Saint Paul*, 68–69.

²³Maritain, *Range of Reason*, 132.

²⁴Evans and Ward, *Social and Political Philosophy*, 201.

²⁵Ibid.

A Christian encounters some Jews who would like to forget their Jewishness and want no truck with such "mystery," hoping against hope for the day when Jews are simply treated in the same way as everybody else in every other ethnic group. (I have sometimes tried to think about Jews that way myself, thinking it the fairest and best way.) Still, to meet Jews, even unbelieving Jews, is in some special way to meet those to whom Christians are in debt. The Jews brought God to Christians. From this one can understand the force behind the thought of those Jewish writers, such as Franz Rosenzweig,²⁶ who held that the mission of Christianity is to bring the God of Judaism to the Gentiles. Whatever it is that Christians claim for themselves, including the Christ, they received first from the Jews.

The other side of this mystery is what Christianity represents to Jews. Rabbi Leon Klenicki, who was born and brought up in Argentina, has recently written a most powerful essay of which the opening words are as follows:

I see it every time I leave the synagogue. On Saturday morning after services, while going home, it is there, waiting for me, challenging me. It is the cross of a nearby church. Why does it disturb me? The sanctity of the day is marred by an image projecting memories of the past, memories transmitted by generations, by my parents, memories of experiences I never had. They are images of and memories of persecution and contempt for my people. I am overwhelmed despite my own religious feelings of fellowship and my commitment to an ongoing dialogue with Christians. The cross is there, a challenge to my inner peace! I realized that I did not think of the cross as a symbol of Christianity. I was looking at a symbol of a group of people who in the name of their own religion had been unkind, at times evil to my own faith community. I felt uneasy, ambiguous about the cross.²⁷

The saddest feature of Christian anti-Semitism is that it has rendered the cross such a painful symbol for the Jew, even for one like Rabbi Klenicki who has long worked to bring Jews and Christians closer together. Rabbi Klenicki's meditation on his disquieting struggle to

²⁶See Leon Klenicki, "On Christianity: Towards a Process of Historical and Spiritual Healing. Understanding the Other as a Person of God," *SIDIC*, vol. 24, nos. 2-3 (1991). English ed., 31-33.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 25-26.

order his own heart in a way fair to the anguish of the past is sensitive in its nuances and details, too much so to summarize. He asserts that he was in his youth very much influenced by the writings of Jacques Maritain. Klenicki's own work is evidence that a significant number of Jews and Christians of our generation are prepared to see in one another the workings of the hand of God; to acknowledge before each other the painfully separate and yet necessarily complementary roles that our two faiths continue to play. As some Christians see that the continuing health of a vital Jewish community is in the concrete order indispensable to Christian life, it may be that some Jews, too, see that the continuing health of Christian life is in the concrete order indispensable to the life and self-understanding of Judaism.

Radically Divided and United

These are dark and difficult matters. One does not want to be party to a false irenicism. It is essential, however, to discern the great difference between the abstract order and the concrete order. In the abstract, Jewish belief about Christ and Christian belief about Christ are contradictory. In the concrete, generations of, on the whole, amicable pluralistic experience have persuaded Christians and Jews that God is in fact present and active in both their religious communities. How can this be? Abstractly considered, it is a puzzle. Experience shows, however, that it is so. I have been certain on a few occasions among Jews that I was in the presence of God, of what we Catholics call "grace," as certain as I have felt in the presence of certain holy Christians, such as Mother Theresa. In more humble, ordinary settings, I have seen such acts of generosity, compassion, charity, and gentleness among Jews that I was obliged to see relived around me the same habits once learned by Jesus, Mary, Anne, John the Baptist, and others among their own neighbors. I felt in such behavior the tug of the commandments of the same God.

I do not deny that there are some characteristic differences in Christians *qua* Christians and Jews *qua* Jews, for example, in the communal, self-internalized ways in which we react to certain stimuli. Experience suggests that these differences exist, sometimes regarding instinctive reactions; sometimes regarding ethical judgments of certain kinds; sometimes regarding contrasting sets of suspicions and fears. These differences are stimulating, invaluable, and often a delight. (They are even the subject of wonderful jokes.) The two communities

are not only different but divided on radical points. On the whole, though, and as this world goes, they have in common much that is precious, deep, and imperishable.

The world needs more faithful Jews and more faithful Christians, not fewer of either. And the faithful ones not only know that they need each other; in one another they often recognize, without knowing how or why, the presence of the same G-d they both love, and by whom they know themselves to be loved, forevermore.