

BLACKFRIARS

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SUPPLEMENT: THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

No one to-day can fail to recognise that the Jewish people sets a problem for the world to solve in its post-war dispositions. Every one must have asked himself what is the reason, and how is it possible that Hitler should have already butchered nearly a fifth of the whole Jewish race—(it is said that nearly three million Jews have been massacred from the total of the whole race of sixteen millions). This savagery is literally unimaginable, and if any have failed to regard these facts as indicative of a vital problem, it is because the imagination fails to register a picture of the cold-blooded torture

and murder of so vast a number of men, women and children. With any conception of what man is, one can only stand speechless in view of these depths to which the 'advance' of our civilization has led us. We piously hope that such a numbing of the senses before an experience beyond their capacities explains why so many outside Germany remain indifferent, and even begin to walk the same path as the Nazis. For anti-semitism, in spite of this example of unrestrained bestiality, is on the increase even in the allied countries; reports of outrages come in particular from America, Canada and South Africa. A recent issue of the American paper *P.M.* gives some facts of anti-Jewish disturbances in Boston; the incidents are typical of the Nazi methods. These sinister facts turn the sound of all the Reports, Charters, Plans and Points for Reconstruction into the music of Nero's fiddle. With our human senses numbed, forgetting the nature of man, and following the way of the Beast, we think to provide stability in our own society with justice and amity.

The need for clear thinking on the question of the Jews is imperative. The tendency to be unthinking and swayed by passion in their regard divides the majority of us into two camps, both equally insecure and dangerous. Those who, in increasing numbers, allow hatred of the Jewish people to turn them from the paths of humanity, are set in contrast to the men and women of sympathy whose horror at the present atrocities leads them to treat this people as though there were no distinction between circumcision and baptism. These latter, however devoted they may be to the person of Christ, fail to recognise any essential difference between the Old and the New Testaments, still less between the Chosen Race and the Gentiles. Both camps are passionate and unreasoning, and thus the problem becomes more acute.

There is of course *no* solution to the problem, as M. Maritain has said in an illuminating essay of first rank importance. (*The Mystery of Israel* which appears in his recent volume *Redeeming the Time*, pp. 123 sqq.) But if we attempt a solution on the basis of unreasoned emotion we shall succeed only in having imputed to ourselves a considerable measure of the German guilt. For on this level the only solution that carries any mark of success is that of complete extermination as planned and carried out so thoroughly by the Nazis. Other races have been smothered, like the Aztecs, by brutal force combined with more subtle methods of undermining the nation's will to live. There are some who regard this fate as inevitable for the Jews within the next few generations.

Still on the purely natural plane but in an opposite direction, and not therefore excluding the supernatural approach, lie the proposals

of Zionism, which seeks to make the wandering and nomadic Jew once again into a political unit and so to redeem the Diaspora, to gather together into Palestine the race that has been dispersed over the world for a greater length of time than the Church of Christ. The Reverend W. W. Simpson, organising Secretary of the Council of Christians and Jews, has in the present number of *BLACKFRIARS* set forth the case for Zionism in its most cogent form, and in this way it does offer some partial solution. But a nationalist solution does not recognise the peculiar nature of the one nation that has been chosen by God, of a nation whose very blood proclaims a divine vocation. One of Hitler's worst blasphemies has been to ape all the prerogatives of the chosen race while lacking that divine choice. The problem that he has raised by this sacrilegious consecration of the Aryan race might be solved in some unstable fashion by confining the Germans within Germany, but the establishment of the Jews in Palestine will not even bring a parallel solution, for this people has some mysterious, universal vocation in the divine choice which never changes. *As touching the election*, says S. Paul, *they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.*

M. Maritain rightly insists that there is no solution, that '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 solution, of course, must always be attempted, just as the mind must always seek understanding of Divine Mystery. But like so many of the acute problems raised by the present war and by the industrial civilisation in general, an attempt at a complete solution on a plane lower than Christianity and the supernatural will add to the confusion and despair of the world. Just as the only hope for true peace lies in the grace and charity of Christ, so the only hope of justice for the Jews must be sought from *true* Christians. It is essentially a Christian problem, and it can be tackled only in the Christian, Catholic way—Maritain in this context refers to the attitude of mind 'which neither definitely resolves nor overcomes antinomies, but at each moment in time discovers whatever is needed to make them bearable and more supple.'

In the first place, only the Christian (or the Jew, but from another angle) can begin to understand the Jewish race which was born and nourished in view of a world-wide, Catholic, mission to bring all men to God. That is why the organisation of the Catholic Church presents the one model on which the Jewish people could dispose themselves in a way that would be conformable to their nature and calling. Supra-national, but held together by the bonds

of blood and worship, by faith and the Shekinah, the presence of Yahwe with his people. But the organisation of a Church Catholic is necessarily unique, so that the two never co-exist in harmony. At this point lies the stumbling block over which the greatest and the smallest will fall until such time as *all Israel shall be saved*. 'The diaspora,' to quote Maritain's invaluable essay once again, 'is the earthly and bruised counterpart of the universality of the Church.' There can be no permanent harmony between the two mystical bodies with, originally, the one identical vocation, subsequently so diversely interpreted.

This does not mean that the Catholic attitude to Judaism must be that of an intolerant rival. The claim of Israel to the Kingdom of God on earth of its nature leads to grave evils when staked unconsciously and selfishly by a Jew whose religion means nothing to him; most of the real wrong-doing and proud selfishness attributed to the Jews derives from those who have lost the spirit of Israel and retained only the intense racial desire for an earthly kingdom. Even so, the Christian has no justification for hatred of even the few, still less for any general anti-semitism. It is not only that the Christian is himself an element in the problem, the mystery that *blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the Gentiles should come in*. More than that, the Gentile Christian who spurns Israel will find—if he looks—that the object of his contempt or hatred lies as much in himself. This is a psychological fact, true of almost all passionate condemnation of the crimes of others; it is one of the chief elements in the passionate hatred of this race by the Nazis. The man who attacks the Jew for being avaricious or socially parasitical will be found himself to be amassing wealth or coveting wealth amassed by others, and cheerfully sucking society with all his strength. Whenever Christians accuse the Jews of their unreasoning adherence to the Law without the virtues or the spirit of religion, they will be found to be relying on the outward practice of their own religion, their charity having been frozen up. The Christian so often glibly points to the curse called down by the accusers of Jesus upon the whole people before Pilate's judgment seat; and he regards himself as having inherited the kingdom. This kingdom quickly becomes in his eyes an earthly sanctuary from the shelter of which he looks out complacently upon disinherited Esau and the world of iniquity. To adopt such an attitude is to assume all the worst features that Jesus condemned in the Chosen Race, and it adds another claimant to the earthly paradise of Judah. The Gentile who thus abuses the prerogatives of the Chosen Race under the guise of being a disciple of Jesus, is denying by his action the

whole mission of Christ. *Be not highminded, but fear. For if God hath not spared the natural branches, fear lest perhaps also he spare not thee.*

The question then is a Christian one, and although incapable of ultimate solution it is patient of one, and only one, Christian line of conduct, and this is the one practical approach if justice is to be done after the war: To set aside condemnation and all condescending pity, to drop the complacency that leads to intolerance, and to approach Israel as the sacred of God, the chosen race, the people to whom grace and the Cross of Christ are 'natural.' The root of the olive tree that God planted remains holy, St. Paul tells us, and we, the Gentiles, naturally wild, of the stock of savagery, have been grafted into the good olive tree: *how much more shall they that are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?* If God continues to love his chosen people with the immutability of his consecrating election, what Christian may cast them aside as a useless people no longer required in the world? Every Christian grows up from their stock, as Christ himself was the perfect Jew, and as his Mother showed the unparalleled graciousness of a youthful Jewess, and as the Apostles spread the Gospel in every country with the unflagging energy of Jewish fishermen. Thus others, as well as Maritain, have pointed out that the attack on Judaism is an attack on the Christian religion. And, if the Gentile Christian is going to play his appointed part in the mystery of election and adoption these words of the French philosopher give him his cue: 'Do what we will—or even do what it wills—the people of Israel remains the priestly people. The bad Jew is a kind of bad priest; God will have no one raise his hand against either. And, even before recognizing Christ, the true Israelite in whom there is no guile, by virtue of an unbreakable promise, wears the livery of the Messiah.'

Should the impossible come to pass, should this virile people be exterminated by the rising flood of persecution, it would be more than a lasting shame upon Christians, it would be their own uprooting. They would have finally and utterly failed Christ.

Did God cast off his people? God forbid.

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In the present issue of **BLACKFRIARS** the contributors have all begun from the same foundation, which gives the articles a unified theme. Nothing very practical is suggested, but it is far more important that this general attitude of charity and humility should be first adopted, since it is so very rare. We are most grateful to the contributors for co-operating so generously.—EDITOR.