

Some Basic Causes of Antisemitism

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“LET us now work together with a view to putting an end to antisemitism, which I consider to be a monstrum left over from long-forgotten days.”¹ This is a typical utterance by a great humanist early in the century, for antisemitism to the humanists was nothing more than a ghastly anachronism doomed to pass away with the ever-increasing enlightenment of the human spirit. Those that remained unblinded by the fallacies of humanistic idealism and warned the world of a coming wave of antisemitism were contemptuously dismissed as obscurantists. To-day, however, thinking men everywhere are being forced to recognize in antisemitism a deadly danger to our civilization and an implacable foe to all religion that has the Divine revelation to Israel at its root. Unfortunately very much of recent literature on the subject has remained on the old humanistic plane. The causes of antisemitism are sought in fairly superficial and obvious facts (though there is wide divergence of opinion as to what these facts may be), and it is suggested that a show of reason and goodwill on the part of all concerned together with certain practical measures (about which there is again wide divergence of opinion) would very soon relegate it to the realm of the past.

We are convinced that G. F. Abbott was right, when he wrote, “Viewed then in the light of two thousand years’ recorded experience, modern antisemitism appears to be neither religious, nor racial, nor economical in its origin and character. It is all three and something more.”² This article is concerned solely with this “something more,” something to our mind essentially spiritual springing from the fallen nature of man. We shall try to point out three of the hidden springs from whence antisemitism flows, one particularly affecting the Jew, and two the nations.

We are doing little more than amplifying a statement of Maritain’s, “And we must say that, if St. Paul be right,

¹ Coudenhove-Kalergi: *Antisemitism Throughout the Ages*, p. 222.

² G. F. Abbott: *Israel in Europe*, p. 407.

what is called the *Jewish problem* is an *insoluble* problem, that is, one without *definitive* solution until the great reintegration foretold by the apostle, which will resemble a resurrection from the dead."¹

I

Louis Golding commences his well-written book, *The Jewish Problem*, with the words, "In entitling the first chapter of this book 'The Gentile Problem' let me state at once that in my view this would have been a more accurate title for the whole book than the one it bears. The Jewish Problem is in essence a Gentile Problem. . . . I mean that the Jewish Problem has been a Gentile Problem from the first decades in which it raised its baneful head, and will remain so till the Gentiles themselves have solved it. There is no contribution the Jews themselves can make towards a solution which is not sooner or later pronounced an aggravation."²

The overwhelming majority of writers against antisemitism would endorse Golding's statement. However much they may stress the unfortunate manner in which many Jews have helped to irritate their Gentile neighbours, they are agreed that the real blame lies with the latter.

One of the ablest and most interesting works to appear in recent years supporting this attitude is James Parke's standard work on the relations between the Early Church and the Jews, *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue*. In it he attempts to show, not altogether convincingly, that the frequent accusations brought by the Early Fathers against the Jews of having persecuted the Christians or urged on their persecution, whenever they had the chance, had no real foundation in fact. He puts the blame for the Church's dislike of the Jews on the Church itself, attributing it largely to the latter's wrong use of the Scriptures; he finds its beginnings clearly foreshadowed in the New Testament itself.

We feel convinced that an unbiased student of the tragic history of the Jews since the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple must feel that there is more behind it than this. He who accepts the Bible at its face value *knows* there is.

God chose Abraham, that in him and in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.³ Though the full

¹ Jacques Maritain: *Antisemitism*, p. 17.

² Louis Golding: *The Jewish Problem*, p. 11.

³ Genesis xii. 3, xxii. 18, *et alia*.

revelation of God's grace came through Jesus Christ,¹ no one will doubt that the principle of grace was operative from the first. The election of Israel of necessity implied a work of God in its midst that made the people different from other nations. Chosen as it was of God, it could only find true satisfaction in the carrying out of God's purposes for it. In spite of much suffering and affliction through the centuries, the people as a whole were unable or unwilling to grasp what the object of their election was. Finally, by their rejection of the Messiah they showed once and for all that they were not fitted *as a people* for the carrying out of God's purpose for them.² But "the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance."³ God may be forced *for a time* to lay aside His purpose with Israel, but it still remains the chosen people, and as such it cannot find true satisfaction away from the path that God had planned for it. Maritain says well, "Israel, like the Church, is in the world and not of the world. But since the day when it stumbled, because its leaders chose the world, it is bound to the world, prisoner and victim of that world which it loves; but *of which* it is not, shall not be, and never can be."⁴

By the very nature of things, not to carry out that for which one has been created means tragedy, not only in man but also in all living organisms. Israel having missed its way, having failed to carry out that for which it was called into being, has become a curse both to itself and to the nations among which it dwells. This is one reason why dislike of the Jew is so chronic, especially in those countries and districts where he forms a large proportion of the population.

To say this is not to justify antisemitism or dislike of the Jew in the slightest. When we say that the Jew is a curse to those in whose midst he lives, we mean that he acts as an irritant or foreign body. The pearl is the result of such an irritant in the oyster, and so it can be with the Jew. History

¹ John i. 17.

² There is a very strong modern tendency to whitewash the Jews for their share in the crucifixion of Christ, the blame being laid solely or mainly on the Sadducean priests. This may be true, though we doubt it. It does not alter the fact that Christ was almost from the first consistently rejected by the Pharisees, the acknowledged religious leaders of the people, and it was their descendants, who deliberately and consistently obliterated all traces of Christianity from Judaism.

³ Romans xi. 29.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 18.

shows plainly that the promise, " I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse " ¹ is true. The nation or person that welcomes the Jew for " the fathers' sake " and because " of them is Christ as concerning the flesh " will be a blessing to the Jew and will bring a blessing on himself ; the nation or person that despises and hates the Jew brings a curse both on the Jew and on himself.

No treatment of antisemitism can be adequate unless one is willing to tell the Jew clearly but lovingly that he bears his share of the blame for antisemitism, that until the wrong attitude to God and His will that culminated in Golgotha is put right, dislike and hatred of the Jew will continue, and he will be called on to suffer more and yet more.

II

There are few things fallen human nature dislikes more than God's sovereignty and election in grace. Humanism in theology has always scoffed bitterly at the doctrine of the predestination of the true members of the Church of Christ. We still remember the dismay of a minister of the Church of England, who was proud to call himself an Evangelical, when we told him that to our certain knowledge there were still not a few Calvinists among the clergy of that church. To the world predestination is mere folly, for it will not accept His sovereignty. Need we be surprised then, if knowingly or unknowingly the world hates the Jew for his proud but justified claim to be the elect of God.

The extent of this hatred of God's sovereign will, of this rebellion against His choice, can best be gauged, if we consider first its prevalence in the Church itself. We have already referred to the very widespread denial of God's sovereign election and predestination of the members of the Church of Christ ; it need hardly be said that the same holds good with God's choice of Israel. Generally it is denied, but even when it is accepted, it is normally emptied of its full meaning. In any case " there is a general consensus of opinion " that there can be no question of the restoration of Israel to its lost privileges.

This denial is not confined to those that deny God's predestinating grace in the Church. There are many that rejoice in their own election who definitely teach in defiance of Scripture that God's purposes with Israel were terminated

¹ Genesis xii. 3.

at the Cross and that all the promises to Israel have found, or will find their fulfilment in the Church.¹ It is noticeable too how in circles where "prophetic and dispensational truth" receive their due, or even undue, share of attention the fact that Israel "in this present dispensation" is "put aside" in favour of the Church is often stressed with obvious, though probably unconscious, satisfaction. We suspect, too, that the great attraction of "British-Israel" teaching for most of its supporters is that it transfers or extends the election of Israel to the Anglo-Saxon nations.

If then the Church can hardly accept God's election of Israel, how much less the world? The very fact of God's sovereignty is abhorrent to most; that it is the Jew, whom He should have chosen, adds insult to injury. Our Lord said, "If the world hateth you, know ye that it hath hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."² In spite of Israel's hardening and stumbling, the mark of God is yet sufficiently upon it to prevent it being "of the world." So Israel must suffer, even against its will and without profit to itself, just because man will not accept God's election.

It is here that the explanation of the peculiar virulence of antisemitism in Nazi Germany is to be sought. Antisemitism is not merely accidental in Hitler's system; it is fundamental, and by the nature of things must be so. For the Nazi, and for that matter for Hitler himself, the German is "God's" chosen race and Hitler is the new Messiah. Hatred and persecution of the Jew and of the Church alike was the natural and inevitable corollary of this belief. The persecution of the former was the bitterer, for a large section of the churches accepted the Nazi claims, or compromised with them. For the Jew there could be neither acceptance nor compromise.

Wherever that "mystic" nationalism that lies behind Nazi Germany rears its evil head, it is accompanied by anti-semitism. The normal man dislikes the Jew for his claim to be the chosen of God. When, however, he looks upon

¹ The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa recently adopted this position in an extreme form by an overwhelming majority in its Synod.

² John xv. 18-19.

himself and his nation as God's elect, he is bound to hate the Jew, or anyone else that would deny his claim.

III

Fallen man does not only object to the sovereignty of God, he dislikes the very need of God. The motive behind the Fall was to be "as God."¹ It is natural for man, both individually and collectively, to hide away, ignore, and even deny his weaknesses. The Tower of Babel² is but the first recorded attempt of man's efforts to build a system which would exclude all need of God. Every such attempt, whether individual or collective, is rendered vain either by man's inherent sin and weakness, or by the direct touch of God's power. When that happens, rather than admit his own sin and impotence, man looks around for some scapegoat on whom he may lay the blame. It is, however, rare that an individual can adequately fill the role, and so normally some type or personification is used. Some of the commoner scapegoats of to-day are the capitalist, the communist, the Fascist and Nazi, and above all the Jew.

The Jew is peculiarly suited for this role. The scapegoat must in some measure be different from those that use him to rid themselves of their sense of guilt, impotence and failure, otherwise he will be lacking in his psychological effect. Both heritage and environment have tended to create in the Jew other virtues and vices than those of his Gentile neighbours. When his faults are magnified, and his merits passed over in silence, he admirably fits the role he is called on to play. The effect is very often heightened by ascribing to the "Jew" the faults and crimes of a few of his number, and by reading evil motives into his very virtues.

Rauschnig writes very well, "Antisemitism is the temptation to see evil not in oneself but in another. It is the flight from a moral and spiritual claim on oneself to a material claim on another, who may be made responsible for one's own weaknesses and misfortunes. Antisemitism is also an expression of the temptation of the present day to substitute for one's own spiritual transformation a general hitting out at others. The evil that one will not recognize in oneself is combated in a plausible personification."³

The antisemitic propagandist deals not only in crude exaggerations, but also in deliberate and obvious lies.

¹ Genesis iii. 5.

² Genesis xi. 1-9.

³ Hermann Rauschnig: *The Beast from the Abyss*, p. 156.

"Decent" people are therefore prone to believe that anti-semitism is only preached for political and demagogic reasons and that those that are sincere in their beliefs are merely dupes, who would see the error of their ways, if the truth were but presented to them. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The rank and file of the antisemitic parties are seldom dupes. They believe what they are told because they want to believe it; they are antisemites because they thereby give expression to the desires of their unregenerate hearts. Much the same is true of their leaders. There have been professional Jew-baiters who would have been willing to join the Synagogue, had they seen enough profit to be made by so doing, but the antisemitic leader is seldom of this type. Antisemitism is an essential part not only of the Nazi system but also of Hitler himself. It is not mere chance that Coudreanu, the founder of Roumania's ill-famed Iron Guard, placed his movement under the patronage of the Archangel Michael; he undoubtedly looked upon himself as a second Michael fighting God's battle against the Jew-Dragon. The fact that they try to spread their views by deliberate lies must not be taken to imply that they are not convinced of the essential rightness of their cause.

IV

Antisemitism then is not merely "a monstrem left over from long-forgotten days"; it is not true that "it is doomed, and its days are numbered."¹ It springs from the interaction of unregenerate Jew and unregenerate Gentile, and it must bear its bitter fruit until both bow their knee in the name of Jesus. Learning and reason may lessen it; peace and prosperity may cause it to die down; but the root of bitterness will remain, ready to spring up and bear fruit again in due season.

Maritain is right, when he calls the Jewish problem insoluble, insoluble that is to the wisdom of man. It finds a partial solution as Jew and Gentile turn in humility to Christ as their common Saviour and Lord, and become members of that body in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile.² Its final solution, when "all Israel shall be saved,"³ awaits the coming of our Lord in glory.

¹ Coudenhove-Kalergi: *op. cit.*, p. 223.

² Galatians iii. 28; Colossians iii. 11.

³ Romans xi. 26.