

Anti-Judaism

1. In current usage, anti-Judaism and antisemitism are synonymous. It is important to distinguish them. Anti-Judaism involves a reference to religion. It can be found in various forms. Anti-Judaism existed before Christianity. It is echoed in books of the Bible, in particular from the period of Exodus. The same occurred at the time of the Maccabees. Despite the rights that had been accorded to the Jews, the Roman Empire went through periods of anti-Judaism. For Israel has always proudly defended its identity, the foundation of which is religious. In this way it has escaped an assimilation which would have meant its disappearance. Hence its fidelity to the rituals which give it its identity and the refusal to worship the holders of political power, which would have been a sin of idolatry. Anti-Judaism has various Christian manifestations. It is necessary to define the term, since 'Judaism' refers to two distinct realities, even if they are closely connected: on the one hand, to a complex of religious doctrines, on the other to the Jewish people which is linked to these doctrines, to which it owes its *raison d'être*, its unity and historical dynamism. Sometimes the term has both meanings at once. The prefix 'anti-' does not always or necessarily have a pejorative sense. It can, with regard to certain doctrines, indicate an opposition and an incompatibility, without implying hostile sentiments with regard to individuals. This holds good for dialogues which presupposes respect for the partner in discussion. But this has not been the prevalent form of anti-Judaism.
2. Jesus was Jewish, as were Mary, the apostles, and the first disciples. The disciples continued to go to the Temple of the synagogue. They had recognized in Jesus the Messiah of Israel and the son of God. This was the heart of the matter. There was a split between them and those who rejected this identification. The missions of St Paul as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles tell us a lot. In any city to which the 'apostle of the gentiles' came he first went to the synagogue of any city to preach the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. When he met with rejection – from many but not all – he turned to the gentiles. The influx of converts into the young Church required a process of clarification which was not without painful frictions. Was it necessary to impose on this new Christians practices inherited from the Old Law? Here, again, the role of Paul was decisive. Behind all of this there was, then, a confrontation about the key issue of faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. The Gospels themselves bear the mark of a controversy about the fundamental issue. The accusation of anti-Judaism has been levelled at them – especially the Gospel of John, and the way in which the word 'Jew' is used in

it. A number of exegetical studies have put this accusation in a true light. There is another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration. These early Christians were shocked by the fact that the majority of the Jews refused a message which was intended primarily for them. Paul himself bears witness to this: it is the point of departure for his meditation on the mystery of Israel. The pagans who converted to Christianity were predominantly of a socially modest origin, while the Jewish converts were from the educated converts. Jewish communities enjoyed certain relatively efficacious legal guarantees: Christians did not have recourse to such guarantees. Consequently, right up to the fourth century the balance of forces was not in their favour. The effects of this situation show themselves in the language used in controversies, in which doctrinal debate was indistinguishable from pastoral concerns. This explains (though does not justify) the violent diatribes of a John Chrysostom in his polemic against Judaizers. Beyond the level of language, the arguments of some writers are of a dubious nature. They bear the mark of anti-Judaism. All the same, the Fathers of the Church are not unanimous in their views. St Augustine sees in the reality of the Jewish people the persistence of a punishment, in that the Jews were condemned to be carriers of the scriptures whose meaning they did not understand, while the Church, the 'true Israel', did understand it: 'The Jew carries the book which is the basis of the Christian's belief' (Ennarr. in Ps. 56.9). The first Christian apologists take care to emphasize the specificity and the novelty of Christianity, showing how Jesus Christ opens up the meaning of the Scriptures. At the same time – and this must be stressed – they were combatting the heresy of Marcion, who, in the name of the New Testament which makes manifest to us the love of the Father – rejects the Old Testament which he claimed was the work of another God. The Church kept up a continual resistance to a Marcionism that was always ready to reappear in a new form. In his work on Marcion of 1921 the great liberal Protestant historian Adolf von Harnack did not restrain his admiration; he regretted that the Reformers were not able to escape the influence of the Old Testament.

3. The conversion of Constantine, the publication of the Edict of Milan (313), and the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion, open a new period the features of which would last until the French Revolution. The Jews, as they lost step by step the rights they had acquired, found themselves being segregated. This situation would favour anti-Judaism. This situation is not susceptible of a mono-causal explanation. The empire, and subsequently, kings and princes, regulated the status of the Jews with a greater or lesser degree of strictness; the intention could be to harass them, or to protect them. Simple theological opinions, even if widely shared, emanating from

individual bishops or regional councils, do not have the authority of the true teaching of the Church, which did not always meet the obedience owed to it. The Jewish people was also made to bear the whole responsibility for the death of Christ – the people of his time and of all subsequent generations. The reply of the crowd present at the trial of Jesus – ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children’ (Mt. 27: 28) was instrumentalized, its meaning distorted, so as to see in it the cause of a curse weighing on the Jewish people for future generations. The calumny of a people of God-killers fits in the same framework. Furthermore the refusal of the majority of the religious leaders to believe in Christ was interpreted as a sign for Israel of the end of its status as chosen people. The Church, the ‘true Israel’, took the place of the Jewish people. The Jews were accused of ritual murder or of poisoning wells and were obliged to listen to sermons demonstrating the falsity of their religion. Sometimes it even went so far as to force them to receive baptism against their will, not to mention the ghetto and the obligation to wear the ‘Jewish sign’, consisting of a yellow cloth ring sewn to the left hand side of what they were wearing. The papacy never approved of such behaviour, which is a blot on the history of Christianity. Throughout the Middle Ages, the papacy’s acted as protector of the rights of the Jews to freedom of conscience. The Decretum of Gratian (I. Dist 45, ad 31) includes a letter of St Gregory the Great which exhorts the bishops of Arles and Marseilles not to tolerate forced baptisms - but the voice of the pope was not always heard. No reminder of the drama of the Maraños (Spanish Jews forced to convert at the end of the Middle Ages) is required. The massacres of the Jews in the Rhine valley before the departure of the Second Crusade aroused vehement protests from St Bernard. In a world full of prejudice and violence contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, the voice of conscience knew how to make itself heard. On the doctrinal level, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (1 P. ch. V, on the fourth article of the creed, ‘suffered under Pontius Pilate’) is clear: ‘the Son of God our Saviour intended his passion and death to ransom and cancel the sins of all times and to offer to his Father for sins abundant and complete satisfaction... Consequently we should hold responsible for this terrible guilt those who continue to fall back into their sins.’) The text concludes with these explicit words: ‘And we should recognize the fact that our crime is greater than that of the Jews. Since they, according to St Paul’s testimony (1 Co. 2.8), “had they known the King of Glory, would never have crucified him”. We, on the other hand, claim to know him. And when we deny him with our actions, we in some sense lay on him our God-killing hands.’ One has to be astounded at the ignorance of Scripture and the pseudo-theological arguments off which anti-Judaism feeds. The Catechism cites St Paul. He echoes the words of Jesus

on the cross: “Father, forgive them because they know not what they do’ (Lc 23: 34). The same holds good for the speech of Peter and his discourse in Acts: ‘Truly, brothers, I know that it was in ignorance that you acted, as did your leaders’ – words which preceded an appeal for conversion. (For the speech of St Paul cf. 13: 26, f.) As for responsibility for the death of Jesus, one should bear in mind what the documents tell us about the historical responsibility. It was distributed unevenly. So far as the Jews are concerned it rests on the religious leaders and on the crowds that they had stirred up: not by any means of the Jews of the time in general, and still less on subsequent generations. The guilt attributed to them and for which they were urged to repent was their lack of belief. As for each persons responsibility before God, it is God’s secret. The Catechism of Trent leads us to refer again to the affirmation of St Paul to the Galatians: ‘Christ has paid the price to free us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us ... (Galatians 3: 13). Or again, ‘Him, who knew no sin, he hath made sin for us, that we might be made the justice of God in him’ (2 Co 5: 21; cf. Rom. 8: 3). Finally, once again St Paul in chapters 9-11 of the Epistle to the Romans set of the principles of the Church’s thinking on the mystery of Israel.

4. These principles inspire the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate* on the relation of the Church with non-Christian religions. Section 4 deals with the Jewish religion. A paragraph deplores anti-Semitism in all its manifestations. Section 5 extends the argument to a condemnation of every form of discrimination, which does not water down the condemnation of anti-Judaism, but shows how this is inimical to the very roots of Christianity. The Declaration, far from being an ephemeral text, is based on two dogmatic constitutions, *Lumen gentium* (chapter on the People of God, a text adopted before the Declaration), and *Dei Verbum*. Thus it has the force of the Church’s teaching authority. Furthermore, a text of the magisterium belongs to the living tradition of the Church. Its presence in the teaching and the action of the successor of St Peter shows the extent of its importance. Thus, in November 1974, Paul VI would set up a commission with the task of translating *Aetate nostra* into practice, attaching it to the Secretariat for Christian Unity. To this commission we owe two documents: the first is a guide to the application of the Declaration (03.12.1974), the second deals with the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and in catechesis (24.06.1985). John XXIII had begun a revision of liturgical texts with the aim of removing from them, in particular from the solemn prayers of Good Friday expressions, offensive to the Jewish people. The teaching of the Declaration was taken up in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, published by John Paul II on the thirtieth anniversary of the Council (11.10.1992). Cardinal Ratzinger was the mind behind this great

document. John Paul II often spoke of the links of the Church with the Jewish people. He spelled out the implications of certain points of the Declaration, for instance when at Mainz (17.11.1980), interpreting the thought of his Jewish interlocutors, he spoke of 'the people of God of the Old Covenant which has never been revoked.' His visit to the Synagogue of Rome was an unforgettable occasion (13.04.1986). He made an important speech in which he condemned the idea of rejection of a curse and asserted that 'On the contrary, the Jews remain very dear to God who called them to a mission that was never to be revoked'. The request for forgiveness for the wrongs done by Christians in history is a decisive element of the pontificate of John Paul II. A solemn liturgy was devoted to this end on the occasion of the Great Jubilee. During his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the pope placed a copy of this prayer among the stones of the West Wall of the Temple, where observant Jews go to pray. The deep impression left by this episode stands for all the doctrinal richness and breadth of the Pontificate with regard to the intimate union of the mystery of Israel and the mystery of the Church. Energetic pastoral support is needed to root out from the hearts of Christians the roots of anti-Judaism. We may add that subsequent popes follow in the trace of their predecessors.

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