

# JUDAISM TODAY

**Sr. Marie Callistus De Sion**

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## JUDAISM IN THE PAST

In order to understand the Jews and their preservation as a people throughout the ages, we must go back in history four thousand years to the time when they were constituted a nation on Mt. Sinai. There, while thunder pealed and lightning flashed, God made a covenant with His people whereby He would be their God, giving them the land of Chanaan (or Canaan) as their inheritance, while they, on their side, agreed to keep His law. This law was very exacting, regulating the whole life of the Jew by religious prescriptions which made it virtually necessary for Jews to live apart from the pagan nations around them. Indeed, this separation was the very purpose of the legislation. Had they mingled with their neighbours they would quickly have absorbed their pagan culture and idolatrous worship. As the Chosen People, the People of Israel had to remain apart from the other nations.

As long as the Jews lived in the Promised Land, religion was intimately bound up with the life of the nation; in fact it was the life of the nation. When they began settling outside the Holy Land it was necessary, in order to preserve their Jewishness, that they should live in groups. The evil of anti-Semitism appeared early in the Christian era, resulting, in the Middle Ages, in the ghetto system, whereby all Jews lived within a Sabbath's walk of a town's synagogue. Jews were compelled to live apart from the rest of the population, and were deprived of so many rights enjoyed by the ordinary citizen - that of owning land, for instance, or practising the professions. Their life was one of real hardship. Isolated from general society and forbidden to study in the universities, the Jews, before the French Revolution, centred their life around the study of religious law.

## MODERN JUDAISM

### **Enlightenment**

The upheaval which shook France at the end of the eighteenth century, and which had repercussions throughout the whole of Europe, brought about a great change in the status of Jews. Just as the French Revolution had been prepared by the so-called doctrine of Enlightenment, so also, a revolution of another order was under way in European Jewry, under the name of "Haskalah". Its advocate was a German Jew, Moses Mendelssohn, who tried to combine Judaism with rationalism. Contrary to what had been taught throughout the centuries, he believed that Judaism is not revealed religion, but rather, revealed legislation. He ardently desired to see his co-religionists emerge from their isolation and take their place in society.

Mendelssohn's dream came true, but he did not live to see it. Five years after his death, the French Revolution with its cry of: "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality" ushered in a new era, for the Jews of France first, and later, those of Europe. Jews until this time had always considered themselves (and been

considered) as aliens, living in exile as their forefathers had once lived in Babylon. *All their national hopes and longings turned towards their ancient homeland, and they longed for the coming of the Messiah that He might lead them back to the Promised Land.* Emancipation was to change this concept.

## **Emancipation**

In 1791, all persons living in France were granted French citizenship. Eleven years later Napoleon, after having made a concordat with the Church, wished also to enter into relations with the Jewish body. This he was not able to do, since Judaism, unlike Christianity, had no hierarchy. *The priesthood had disappeared with the destruction of the Temple, and the Jewish religion became a lay institution.* One rabbi might command great respect owing to his reputation for learning, but no rabbi exercised a juridic authority over Jewry either on a provincial, national or international level. Therefore, for Napoleon's purpose, it was necessary to organize some central authority with which he could treat. Accordingly, he set up a consistory of seventy, presided over by a Chief Rabbi, and reminiscent of the Sanhedrin of Biblical days. Following this precedent, Jewry has since tended to be organized on a national basis, headed by a Chief Rabbi, an organization which is more administrative than hierarchical. Once France had granted emancipation to the Jews, it was not long before most of the other countries of Europe followed suit.

## **Assimilation**

With emancipation, another new era had opened up for the European Jew. His newly-acquired citizenship completely changed his outlook on life. Where formerly he had considered himself an exile from the Promised Land, he now looked upon himself as a European citizen, of Jewish religion. In the ghettos of former days, it was not uncommon for almost the whole male population of a community to devote itself to sacred study, whereas, with the coming of emancipation, the Jew was now free to study at the various universities and to engage in professions hitherto barred to him.

Assimilation into a completely new environment tends to lead to loss of religion, and Jews were no exception to this rule; but the process of disintegration was halted by the arrival in the West of Jews from the fervent Eastern European communities who thus proved themselves to be a leaven among their co-religionists. However, this was no lasting remedy, and it was felt that something drastic was needed in order to stem the tide of loss of religious belief.

## **The Reform Movement**

The "something drastic" was the *Reform Movement*. The leader of the reform was David Friedlander who, a disciple of Moses Mendelssohn, was disconcerted at seeing so many of his co-religionists abandoning their ancient faith because it did not seem to them compatible with their newly-found freedom. His reform, drastic as it seemed, was an attempt to save Judaism. Friedlander argued that what Jews needed was a religion in keeping with their new social status. As has been noted above, the practice of Judaism in its entirety demanded a separation from the Gentile world so that the Jew was free to arrange his whole life around the exactions of the law. With this in mind it will readily be seen that the entrance of Jews into the everyday life of Europe was in the nature of a revolution. Once emancipation had come, many Jews felt that in their new life it was impossible to practise their religion in all its detail, and so gave it up altogether.

It was at this point that *David Friedlander* stepped in. Seeing many drifting away from Judaism, he thought that the old religion was incompatible with the new mode of life which so many were adopting; hence, according to him, it was necessary to give Jews a religion better adapted to their new status. His first idea was that, since Jews were now called upon to live in a Gentile atmosphere, their religion should be similar to that of Gentiles. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, Friedlander and his disciples asked to be admitted to the Lutheran Church, on condition that they should be permitted to make a mental reservation concerning the divinity of Christ. This request was naturally refused, and so, in an attempt to save emancipated Jews from losing their religion altogether, Friedlander decided to reform

Judaism itself in order to make it conform to the needs of the Jew in the modern world.

## **Emancipated Religion**

His first move was to alter the concept of revelation. Judaism had always considered that it contained the fulness of revelation - that revelation which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. But if such a tenet were upheld, Friedlander would have no grounds on which to base his reform, since a full revelation could admit of no basic change. Imbued as he was with the rationalism of the pre-revolutionary period, he taught that Judaism is a religion of progressive revelation, without dogmas and subject to reason. With this firmly established, he turned his attention to the liturgy. For centuries Jews had considered themselves as exiles from the Holy Land, whose ambition it was to return to their ancestral home as the exiles in Babylon had once returned in the 6th century before Christ. But Friedlander felt that such a concept was ill-suited to the new status of Jews. They should not consider themselves exiles, since they had now become fully-fledged citizens of the countries into which they were being so quickly assimilated. To fit in with these ideas, the national element was removed from prayers, and the sacred language of Hebrew replaced by the vernacular for prayers, hymns and sermons. Then too, the Sabbath had to be changed in order to fit in with this new mode of thought. By attending the Synagogue on Saturdays, Jews of this new school of thought felt that they were continuing to make themselves singular - it was therefore considered advisable to change the time-honoured Sabbath to Sunday. The other reforms instigated at this time had but one aim - to give the emancipated Jew an emancipated religion.

This reform which was centred in Germany soon spread, but not always in this extreme form. It was not long, in fact, before the reformers realized that they had indeed gone too far, and so today, with very few exceptions, reform Jews keep the Sabbath on Saturday and have returned to the Rabbinic or traditionally Jewish interpretation of the Bible. What the reformers do claim to have done is to have adapted ancient Judaism to suit the circumstances of the modern Jew.

This same period gave rise to another movement which is known as *Conservative Judaism* and arose in America this time. Like Friedlander, Isaac Leeser aimed at preventing the drift from Judaism which occurred in America when Orthodox Jews, no longer able to understand the difficult Synagogue services, began to give up the practice of their religion. Leeser did not wish to found a separate sect as Friedlander had done, but he did want to adapt liturgical practices to the circumstances of the assimilated Jews who, unable to follow the Hebrew services, were leaving the Synagogue. He had prayer books printed in English as well as in Hebrew, and, further, introduced the custom of preaching in English. In contrast to the established custom, he permitted men and women to sit together in the Synagogues and also allowed the worshippers to ride to Synagogues on the Sabbath. Later on, Conservative Judaism crystallized its own doctrine. It holds, for example, together with *Orthodox Judaism*, belief in the immortality of the soul, but, unlike the latter, rejects the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Conservatism claims that it accepts the whole of rabbinic tradition while adapting this tradition to modern needs.

## **THE JEWS TODAY**

The Jews of our day have been profoundly affected by two events - the massacre of six million Jews by the Nazis, and the creation of the State of Israel.

### **The Holocaust (the Shoah)**

Before World War II there were approximately 18,000,000 Jews scattered in almost every country in Europe. By 1945, one-third of these people had been put to death for the sole "crime" of being Jews. We say the words "six million" very quickly, but do we stop to consider that this figure represents almost the total population of Australia before the war? The word used by many Jews in referring to this carnage is "holocaust" - "whole-burnt offering" - reminiscent of the animals which were once offered in sacrifice in the temple. The word is a fitting one to describe this terrible event which should still be stirring the

conscience of the world. The six million Jews who perished in the horror camps of Europe came from many different religious circles and walks of life. There were fervent Jews who went to their death joyfully as martyrs, with the ancient invocation affirming their belief in the one, true God on their lips: "Sh'ma Israel" . . . "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is one God, the Lord alone!" (Deut. 6: 4) Others met their death in a state of bewilderment or rebellion. Some died bereft of all faith and with despair in their hearts, but all died simply and solely because they were Jews. In many cases whole families, and even whole communities perished. There is scarcely a Jew of European origin in the world today who did not lose at least one loved member of his family.

The holocaust has had profound repercussions on those who survived the slaughter. It made many Jews more aware of their Jewishness and helped not a few to return to the practice of their faith. Although not the direct cause of the foundation of the State of Israel, this tragic event certainly had a great influence on it. After the second World War the survivors of the infamous death camps came to Palestine in order to take their place with the pioneers who were preparing the way for the proclamation of independence. We shall see later how their arrival helped to bring matters to a head.

## **Zionism**

The Zionist Movement is a world movement for the re-settlement of Jews in Palestine. In itself, it is nationalistic and political, and, as such, it was, and still is, opposed by many Orthodox and Reform Jews. The Orthodox opposition stemmed from the fact that many felt that it was wrong for Jews to take the initiative in the foundation of a Jewish State. This, it was thought, should be left for the coming of the Messiah who was the one to lead the exiles home. While there are a handful of Jews in Israel today who absolutely refuse to recognize the existence of the State and who consider the use of Hebrew as an every-day language a desecration, maintaining that it may be used only for prayer and sacred study, the general thought seems to be that the return to Palestine is certainly a fulfilment of many prophecies. "O you who are to remind the Lord take no rest and give no rest to Him until He re-establishes Jerusalem and makes of it the pride of the earth." (Isaiah 62: 6, 7) While at one time a striking apparition of the Messiah was looked for, the view of many religious Jews in Israel today is that the expected Messiah may be acting in a hidden way through the human events which have led to the foundation of the State.

Many Reform Jews likewise were unfavourable to the Zionist Movement because they felt that it stressed Jewish nationality and nationhood (as a race) whereas they considered their Jewishness from the religious and cultural angles only. Reform Jews feel that, as Jews living in the Diaspora (dispersion: i.e. Jews dispersed among the nations of the world) they have their own part to play in world Judaism distinct from any state calling itself, Israel.

## **Theodore Herzl**

The father of Zionism was Theodore Herzl, who, although he did not live to see it, is justly regarded as the founder of the State of Israel. A Hungarian Jew, born about 1860, he ardently desired to work for the betterment of his people. His first idea was that the only way to solve the Jewish problem (as the animosity of Gentiles towards Jews was called) was to work for a more and more complete assimilation of Jews into the every-day life of the world around them. Herzl was rudely shaken out of this conviction by the bitterness which arose out of the Dreyfus case.

Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew holding a commission in the French army was, in 1894, falsely accused of treason. In spite of the overwhelming evidence pointing to his innocence he was condemned, the feeling being that only a Jew could stoop to such an act. It took twelve long years for Dreyfus' friends to clear his name. In the meantime the bitterness and strong anti-Semitic feeling which the whole affair occasioned caused Theodore Herzl to abandon his former convictions. Jews, he felt, would never be accepted in society. It was then that he conceived the idea of the legal foundation of a Jewish State, and, for the remainder of his short life (he died at the age of forty-four) he devoted all his energies to the accomplishment of his ideal.

In 1897, Herzl convened the first. Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland. Its aim was to secure by public

law a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. Negotiations were opened with the Ottoman Sultan of Turkey, but without any success. The British Government offered their African possession, Uganda, to the Zionists, but an overwhelming majority refused on the grounds that it was inconceivable that a Jewish State could be set up anywhere but in their ancient home-land.

Herzl died in 1904, but Zionist Congresses continued to meet under the presidency of Chaim Weizmann.

### **The Balfour Declaration**

Weizmann was a scientist of no small talent, and, during the first world war was able to render very valuable services to the British Government by the success of his scientific experiments. England was grateful and asked Weizmann. to name his reward. He replied that he wanted British support for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for his people. Accordingly, in 1917, the Balfour Declaration was drawn up. Its text is as follows: "His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the accomplishment of this object." After the war this declaration was acknowledged by the League of Nations, and the Mandate of Palestine was given to England so that she could work for the implementation of her promise.

In the meanwhile, the Zionist Congress had established the Jewish National Fund (J.N.F.). The money which world Jewry poured into this fund with great generosity was used for the purchase of land in Palestine, to become the inalienable property of the Jewish people. Prior to the first Zionist Congress, the first Jewish immigrants had begun to enter Palestine. Their coming was the result of persecution by the old Czarist regime, but the movement itself was religious in that these Russian Jews had emigrated in order to find freedom of religion. Unlike Zionism, this first movement was not nationalistic, although many Russian Jews later became ardent Zionists.

Long before the foundation of the State of Israel, then, Jews had begun to settle in Palestine, along with a tiny minority of Arabic-speaking native Jews. The first to come were ardent idealists, either religiously, nationalistically or both. Theirs was a true pioneering spirit, ready to sacrifice itself and to be sacrificed for the re-building of Zion.

In the 1930's many Jews, seeing the "writing on the wall" for European Jewry once Hitler had risen to power, were eager to get away while there was still time. A number of these turned towards Palestine, though not necessarily because they were religious, or imbued with the Zionist ideal, although they were, nevertheless, idealists to a certain extent, because at that time, it was possible for them to emigrate to other well-established countries. In going to Palestine they chose a condition of life which was far from easy, and so became part of the foundation on which the future State was to be erected. European Jews who did not emigrate - and they were the vast majority - were caught in Hitler's web, finding that, once the danger became apparent, it was too late, and, to the number of six million and more, they perished in that unbelievable carnage.

### **The Foundation of the State**

From the very moment of his conception of a Jewish State, Theodore Herzl and all who joined the Zionist Movement were determined that the State should be founded legally, be recognized by the great world powers, and be obtained by peaceful, not aggressive means. The first two conditions were fulfilled. With regard to the third, events made it necessary for the newly-born nation to fight for its life.

As early as 1936, conflict had broken out between Jews and Arabs. These latter bitterly resented the coming of the Jews, and, forgetting that the last named had legally obtained the land which they were cultivating so successfully, looked upon them as usurpers. For the Jews at this time, settlement in Palestine had become a matter of life and death. The rioting continued for two years, with the English occupation trying to appease both sides and appeasing neither. It was decreed that Jewish immigration numbers be fixed at 3,000 per year. This was too many for the Arabs, not enough for the Jews, many of whom were

sent back to Europe, there to perish in the holocaust. By dint of persevering, however, some succeeded in entering, legally or otherwise, while British officials, realizing the urgency of the situation, closed their eyes on certain occasions.

To try to solve the problem of the 1936-1938 riots a Royal Commission was set up which found that the mandate was unworkable. It proposed the division of Palestine into three sections - a Jewish and an Arab State, and an international zone which would safeguard the holy places and shrines of all religions.

*In November, 1947, the Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution decreeing that the Mandate should end on the 15th May, 1948, and that Jewish and Arab States and an international zone be established. Thirty-three member states voted in favour of this resolution thirteen against it, while ten abstained. Israel thus became the first nation to be brought into existence by the United Nations.*

On the 14th May, 1948, in Tel Aviv, the foundation of the State of Israel was proclaimed, with Chaim Weizmann as first president, and David Ben-Gurion as first prime minister. The following day, the newly-born nation was attacked on five frontiers by the neighbouring nations. It is no exaggeration to say that this was a life and death struggle. At the time of its proclamation as a state, the population of Israel numbered 650,000, yet was able to withstand the united assault of the surrounding Arab countries whose total inhabitants numbered 30 million.

## **Israel Today**

[Written before the Six-Day war and its 70's aftermath, (Yom Kippur and Sadat, etc) some of this is out of date, but still interesting.]

The war of independence - as Israelis call this conflict - nominally ended in July of the following year, but it cannot be said that peace has been established in the Middle East. While the Jews of Israel publicly declare they are anxious for peace, many of the Arab nations insist that they are still at war with Israel and have refused to sign a peace treaty, and border incidents are frequent. Moreover, the war upset the division of the country as it had been originally planned by the United Nations. As a result, no Arab or Palestinian State was established. Instead, part of the Palestinian territory was treated as de facto Jordanian or Egyptian territory and no effort was made to re-settle the many Palestinian refugees from the conflict. (These included large numbers of Arab Christians. Palestinian refugees have been used as pawns for more than a generation - a breeding ground of resentment against the Israelis, a political propaganda tool of anti-Semitism, and an excuse for unscrupulous Israelis to demolish and confiscate abandoned houses and churches.) Moreover, no international zone has been established and the Holy City of Jerusalem was divided. Jordan retained possession of the old, walled city, while Israel occupied the new Jerusalem to the west, including in its boundaries Mt. Sion, which was the only section of their ancient capital in Jewish hands.

What the world in general finds most astounding about Israel is her immigration policy. In 1948, her population was 650,000, a figure which was doubled by 1953. We in Australia who have increased our population from 7 to 11 million in the space of 13 years [1964] should be able to appreciate just what problems this increase imposes. Moreover, while we have been selective in our immigration policy, Israel has opened her doors wide to any and every prospective migrant Jew, especially those in distress. Firstly there were the victims of the Nazi concentration camps who did survive, and had to be given considerable financial and other assistance to enable them to begin their life anew. Then, too, Israel has been generous in accepting Jews coming in large numbers from the Arab countries (notably North African countries and Yemen) who, in the majority of cases, have arrived penniless.

## **The Diaspora**

When the State of Israel was proclaimed, it was thought by Zionist idealists that all Jews living in the diaspora would want to go to Israel. This, as we know, has not happened. Had the State of Israel been founded even one hundred years earlier it is likely that the majority of Jews would have responded eagerly. Established in modern times, Israel in 1964 had 2 million Jews out of a world population of 12

million. How can we account for this? The reason seems to be that diaspora Jews have become assimilated into the nations and, hence, no longer consider themselves as strangers and exiles, but rather, are proud to call themselves loyal citizens of Australia - America - England ... They see no conflict between their loyalties as Jews and as citizens, just as an Australian Catholic is a no less loyal citizen because of his religious allegiance. Unlike Jews in eighteenth century Europe, they have not kept apart from the society in which they live and have not the sense of separation which was formerly expressed in an intense longing for the opportunity to return to their ancient homeland.

While Israelis tend to feel that complete Jewish living is possible only within the framework of a Jewish state, and, as a consequence, are inclined to view their brothers in the diaspora with a rather superior and condescending air, these latter feel that they have a vital contribution to make within the framework of world Jewry. They are proud of Israel and its achievements and are most generous in moral and financial support, but the majority of Jews living in the great democracies feel that the nationalistic element in Judaism has no part in their religion.

### **Jewish Observance**

What is the religious situation of world Jewry? Figures are most deceptive when trying to depict such a field as the religious observance of any group. In the last analysis, religion is such a personal matter as to defy any attempt at cataloguing. Yet man of necessity feels the need to worship God not only in the secret of his own soul, but publicly, as a social being. While no-one would attempt to consider church or synagogue attendance as a categorical barometer of the religious fervour of a community, yet it cannot be denied that such figures are, nevertheless, straws which help to show which way the wind blows.

Let us look at the young State of Israel. Officially, *Orthodox Judaism* is the only branch of Judaism recognized. There are a few *Reform* or *Liberal* synagogues, but their Rabbis, while being perfectly free to conduct services, are not permitted to perform such acts as officiating at marriages or funerals. All questions of personal status are in the hands of the Rabbinical courts, which are Orthodox. There are *many shades of Orthodoxy* practised in Israel, beginning with the *extremist position* which refuses to acknowledge the existence of the State, considering it blasphemous to have set up a Jewish State in the Holy Land without waiting for the coming of the Messiah. These Jews who are very few in number - less than 200 [1964] - refuse to use Hebrew as an every-day language, maintaining that it be reserved solely for sacred study and for prayer. *Next come the Hassidic Jews* whose roots are in Eastern Europe, and who tend to live in their own closed communities in much the same atmosphere as that of the ghettos of former times. Next come what could be called for want of a better term the "*ordinary*" *Orthodox Jews*. These live their Judaism conscientiously and at the same time are living in the modern world of which Israel forms a part - the only "western" country in Asia.

Besides Orthodox, there are also Liberal or Reform Jews, as has been noted. It is well known that many Israelis profess to have no religion. It is contended by some, however, that the average Israeli is religious. This assumption is based on the importance which ancient history, biblical studies and archaeology hold in the lives of the people. For very many, this is not pre-occupation with questions of religion as such, but merely an intense interest in Israel's ancient culture.

In the diaspora, *America* holds an important position because 6 million Jews, one-half of world Jewry, are living there. From a religious point of view, they may be divided into three equal sections - *Orthodox, Liberal and Conservative*. This is not to suggest, of course, that all practise their Judaism, but rather, shows affiliation with a particular branch of Judaism. There are about 500,000 Jews in *England*, three-quarters of whom are attached to the *Orthodox tradition*, while the remainder are *Reform Jews*. In Europe, 2 million Jews are behind the Iron Curtain [1964] from where disturbing rumours of Jews being persecuted in the Soviet are reaching the outside world. There are not many more than a million Jews in the rest of Europe, the only solid block being in France where Jews now number 500,000. There are approximately 66,000 Jews in *Australia*, 33,000 of whom are in Victoria, and 27,000 in New South Wales, leaving just a sprinkling in the other states. Sixty per cent of Australian Jews are *Orthodox*, fifteen per cent are affiliated with *Liberal Synagogues*, while the remainder claim merely cultural or social ties with

Judaism.

## THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

### Dialogue

Our age has been privileged to witness a wonderful spirit flowing through the whole Christian world - the ecumenical spirit. Still in its infancy, this movement has taught us to look for the things that unite rather than those that divide. It has given rise to a dialogue of Christian love whereby, instead of each denomination arguing its own position, all have been willing, *without sacrificing principles to expediency*, to listen to one another's points of view, and to be eager to understand them even though they cannot subscribe to them.

Since the basis of this dialogue is belief in Jesus Christ, it is evident that non-Christians cannot, strictly speaking, take part in it. In a broad sense, however, a dialogue can take place between Christians and Jews in an ecumenical spirit, that is to say, in a spirit of toleration, brotherly love and understanding. For too long, now, Christians *have been separated from their elder brethren in the faith* by suspicion, discord and even violence. This anti-Semitism culminated in our century in the most brutal crime of genocide in history. This must never be permitted to happen again. But prejudice dies hard, especially when it is unconscious, as are the anti-Semitic prejudices of most people. The aim of the Judaeo-Christian dialogue is to help both Christians and Jews to see each other as they really are, to acknowledge the errors of the past and to plan for *a future of mutual understanding and assistance, for are we not children of the one, heavenly Father, the God of Jew and Christian alike?*

### The Jews and the Council

As we know, it is not possible to state positively what has been or will be decided at the Second Vatican Council which, at the time of writing, has just begun its second session, but several pointers give us the hope that the Jewish question will be raised. Firstly it is very encouraging to note that the Secretariat for Christian Unity, headed by Cardinal Bea, counts among its members priests of Jewish extraction who are specialists in Judaeo-Christian studies. Among these we may mention Mgr. John Oesterreicher of the United States, Abbot Leo Rudloff, O.S.B. of Jerusalem, Israel, and Father Gregory Baum, O.S.A. of Canada. Cardinal Bea has been quoted as saying: "One of the tasks of the Council will be to reject the error according to which the Jews are collectively responsible for Our Lord's death. To make all the Jewish people responsible for this is as inaccurate as to condemn all the German people for the crimes of the Nazis." (*Documentation Catholique*, 2 Sept., 1962.) There is hope that the Council will condemn anti-Semitism along with all anti-racialistic tendencies. The hope has also been expressed that the Council will review the wording of prayers and a manner of presenting teachings which could offend Jewish or other sensibilities.

When the first session of the Council was being prepared, the question was raised of Jewish observers being invited. The problem of Jewish representation is a difficult one because Judaism has no central governing authority, and hence no one observer could represent world Jewry. A representative of Israel's Ministry for Religious Affairs was an official guest at the solemn opening of the Council, and word has just been received that Pope Paul VI has himself raised the question of Jewish and other non-Christian observers being present at the Council's second session.

[As this had been written in 1964, it seems appropriate to record some of the fruits of the hopes and prayers of Sister Marie Callistus de Sion. In 1965, the Vatican Council released the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*). It included this Beautiful passage which well merits profound meditation. . .

*"Sounding the depths of the mystery 'which is the Church, this sacred Council remembers the ties which*

*link the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham.*

*The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all Christ's faithful, who as men of faith are sons of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:7), are included in the same patriarch's call and that the salvation of the Church is mystically prefigured in the exodus of God's chosen people from the land of bondage. On this account the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom. 11:17-24). The Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself (cf. Eph. 2:14-16):*

*Likewise, the Church keeps ever before her mind the words of the apostle Paul about his kinsmen: "they are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom: 9:4-5), the son of the virgin Mary. [The Church] is mindful, moreover, that the apostles, the pillars on which the Church stands, are of Jewish descent as, are many of those early disciples who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world.*

*As holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize it's moment when it came (cf. Lk. 19:42). [Many Jews] for the most part did not accept the Gospel; on the contrary, many opposed the spreading of it (cf. Rom. 11:28). Even so, the apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made. {Cf Rom. 11:28-32; and see the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (AAS 57,) 1965 Paragraph 16.} Together with the prophets and that same apostle, the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Zeph. 3:9; cf. Is. 66:23; Ps 65:4; Rom. 11:11-32).*

*Since Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this, sacred Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. This can be obtained, especially, by way of biblical and theological enquiry and through friendly discussions.*

*Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. John 19:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the Church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the Word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ.*

*Indeed, the Church reproveth every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deplores all hatreds, persecutions or displays of anti-Semitism levelled at any time or from any source against the Jews.*

*The Church always held and continues to hold that Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation. It is the duty of the Church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace.*

*..... We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image. Man's relation to God the Father and man's relation to his fellow-men are so dependent on each other that the Scripture says "he who does not love, does not know God" (1 Jn. 4:8).*

*There is no basis therefore, either in theory or in practice for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people and people arising either from human dignity or from the rights which flow from it.*

*Therefore, the Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, colour, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to "conduct themselves well among the Gentiles" (1 Pet. 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rom. 12:18) and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:45). ....Thus far Vatican II]*

## **THE POPE AND THE JEWS**

The universal grief which the death of Pope John XXIII occasioned is well known. Testimonies of regret, affection and admiration came from all over the world, not the least from the Jews, who held him in great veneration. Numerous and touching tributes were paid to his memory by Jews who felt the warmth of his personality. Pope John XXIII's attitude towards *the children of our Father Abraham* might be summed up by the words with which he greeted a Jewish group coming to pay their respects to him early in his pontificate. In the words of the Patriarch of old he exclaimed: "I am Joseph, your brother."

Jews have been appreciative of his action in changing the wording of the Good Friday Liturgy so that the prayer recited for the Jews would no longer contain the wounding adjective "perfidious" or "faithless". Pope Pius XII had previously ordered that the people should kneel at this prayer just as they do for all the others at this part of the ceremonies. To John XXIII also we owe the removal of a section from the Act of Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart which might have wounded the Jews and other non-Christians.

The kindly feeling with which the election of the successor of this gentle man of God has been received, augurs well for the future. In the Jewish world as elsewhere, it was quickly seen that Pope Paul VI's pontificate would continue in the same ecumenical spirit as that of John XXIII, and the latest report from the Vatican on the subject of non-Christian observers at the Council has borne this out.

## **THE PRESERVATION OF JUDAISM**

A glance at the history of humanity shows the rise and fall of empires, peoples, civilizations. When we look at the history of the Jewish people and place it side by side with that of other ancient peoples whose past was, in some respects, more glorious than that of the Jews we cannot help but wonder: "How can we explain the preservation of this people after the vicissitudes of the past four thousand years?" When we consider the last two thousand years in particular, and the manner in which the Jews have lived scattered throughout all countries, we find various factors at work. Firstly, Judaism has been preserved through the way in which Jews have tended to maintain their national and religious identity by living together in closed communities. Indeed, during the Middle Ages, they were forced to live thus in ghettos. Persecution, as is generally the case, strengthened rather than weakened their religious convictions and their belief in the fact that they were the Chosen People of God.

Emancipation which freed the Jews from their ghettos brought with it the problem of assimilation, which, had it continued unabated, might well have sounded the death knell of Judaism. Two factors played their part in halting these forces. One was the Reform Movement mentioned above which preserved a good section of Jewry from completely losing its Jewish identity. The second was the continued arrival in emancipated Western Europe of fervent Jews from Eastern Europe who acted as a revitalizing element.

The threat of annihilation by the Nazis, once defeated, was answered by the founding of the State of Israel. While the State of Israel did not come into being as a direct result of the holocaust, it cannot be denied that the arrival in Palestine of the survivors of the death camps of Europe was a factor which helped to force the issue.

The State of Israel itself has been under constant threat from hostile enemies who openly declare their intention to annihilate her. Israel is able to maintain her position by reason of her superior technology and organizational powers, to say nothing of the heroism of her citizens. At present these combined forces compensate for the fact that Israelis are far outnumbered by their avowed enemies; but no-one can predict how long this superiority will last.

Jews living in the diaspora are under constant threat of complete assimilation - a danger which is off-set by the attempt to find new spiritual values, or rather, to interpret old spiritual values in a language that modern man can understand. The need of belonging to, of being identified with, one's group plays its major part in the preservation of Judaism.

But only one explanation can account fully for the preservation of the Jewish people - the Will of God. He chose them for a special vocation, and St. Paul, echoing the prophets, tells us that "the gifts and the call of God are without repentance." (Rom. 11: 26) In his Epistle to the Romans, chapters 9 to 11, the theology of the people of Israel is expounded. The Apostle, instructing and warning both Jews and Gentiles of their inseparable destiny, their interdependence in God's plan, ends with the prophecy that "Israel shall be saved."

## A STUDY OF JUDAISM

If any reader wishes to learn more about the Jewish people, the following books can be recommended: -

**The Jewish Faith**, Paul Demann. Faith & Fact Series, Burns & Oates.

**Judaism**, Isidore Epstein. Pelican.

**The Star of David**, Rabbi R. Brasch. Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

**The Eternal Flame**, Rabbi R. Brasch. Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

**This is My God**, Herman Wouk. Jonathan Cape, London.

**The Jews in Our Time**, Norman Bentwich. Pelican.

These works will serve as an introduction to Judaism.

In order to encourage a deeper study of the subject, the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, 1065 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill, 3128, Victoria, have recently opened a Centre of Information on the Jewish question. By means of this Centre they hope to help Christians to appreciate their Jewish roots, and to see Jews in their true light by dispelling prejudices and misconceptions which in the past have led to so much bitter feeling and which today, alas, are still found amongst us. Anti-Semitism, because it is the result of prejudice - and for the most part, unconscious prejudice - prevents us from seeing Jews as they really are, with the same mingling of good, bad and indifferent as everybody else. What this kind of prejudice does is to take the worst type of Jew and call him an average Jew. Such illogical reasoning is its own refutation.

Anti-Semitism is absolutely opposed to Christianity, because, as St. John says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3: 15.)

Pope Pius XI weightily summed up our attitude towards Jews by stating that "spiritually we are all semites."

"Go up on to a high mountain, Sion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news!

Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God!

Here comes with power the Lord God, Who rules by His strong arm; here is His reward with Him, his

recompense before Him.

Like a shepherd He feeds his flock; in His arms He gathers the lambs carrying them in His bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

**- Isaiah 60: 9-11.**