

# The Church and the Jew

Albert Simon

"You will break your parents' hearts - remember God said to Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother." "You must have lost your mind ... a good Jewish ... educated boy like you, what you need is a psychiatrist." But, I answered, "I have been in psychotherapy!" "Then, your psychiatrist needs a psychiatrist!" These words, imbued with anguish, are re-echoed almost every time a Jew comes into his fulfillment—the Holy Catholic Church.

Too frequently the Catholic is delighted with the statistics that indicate the number of Jews entering the Church. These numerical calculations are fine, but they are not made of flesh and blood, heart or conscience. The difficulties encountered by the Jewish-Catholic are so unique that it is usually only those "cradle" Catholics directly and personally involved that are shocked into the realization of the enormous emotional pressures thrust upon the new convert, young or old.

There exists the struggle of the conscience with traditional Jewish attitudes—"Meshumad" (Traitor!); the "shame" inflicted upon the parents and family; and mixed emotions amongst new and old "friends." The pride within Judaism may well be a justifiable one, but as in most cases of pride, when it dominates reason, difficulties and strife become inseparable from it.

But the parents of the Jewish-Catholic have difficulties not unfamiliar to the apostate, for they are suddenly thrown face-to-face with the realities of Catholic existence. The ghetto no longer exists, and the present day poor substitute - sociability requiring activity in the events of the community's synagogue - does not limit the view around. Perhaps up to this crucial point, there has been very careful avoidances of Christian existence. Then, suddenly, the walls have crumbled, a horror and fear encompasses the Jewish family. This perhaps, may be even more true amongst the ultra-orthodox. One bitter Jewish convert, who was an opportunist, stated that "Orthodoxy is the *antidote* to the poison of

"Jesus was not a being come down from heaven, but one who attained heavenly heights. He was not a God who walked on earth like a man but a man who walked with God on earth. He was not a God who lived humanly, but a man who lived divinely.... To us He belongs - not his church, but He-the man, the Jew, the Prophet." Stephen Samuel Wise (Amer. Rabbi, 1874-1949), quoted to 1. Landman, Christian and Jew (Horace Liveright, 1929), p. 292.

"That which makes me a Christian in your eyes make you a Jew in mine." Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (non-Jew) German Poet, Critic (1729-81) in Nathan the Wise, 1779,4.7.

"Christians are not heathens. They believe in God and do not tolerate bloodshed.... We must pray for their welfare." Isaac Lampronti (Italian Rabbi, physician, encyclopedist, 1679-1756) in Pahad Yitzaic, 1750.

The dilemma, again, is relationship with the parents of the Jewish convert. Contact, and thereby, reassurance of love, in many cases coupled with time, re-establishes and reaffirms the family relationship.

Christ's discourse on His coming with a Sword—and that because of Him there will be father against son, mother against daughter, mother against daughter-in-law, occurs over and over every time a Jew enters the Church. Edith Stein's (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) touching description of her mother's reaction and grief upon learning of her daughter's conversion may be considered mild in comparison to many others.

And yet if there can be no mutual understanding, as so superbly put by Robert Briscoe - what recourse does one have? Every call means more heartbreak—as reaffirmation of faith is inevitably forced. Yet not to call? Which is the greater of the two evils?

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Pope John Paul II Society of Evangelists  
P.O. Box 5584, Bakersfield, California 93388  
E-mail: [info@pjpiisoe.org](mailto:info@pjpiisoe.org) Telephone: 661 393-3239  
[www.pjpiisoe.org](http://www.pjpiisoe.org) Pamphlet 305W

The Jew takes great pride in the Jewish background of Christ and the Apostles. It is primarily in the area of Divinity that the parting of the ways occurs. It is curious to note that even today the Pharisaic argument as to the validity of Christ's performing a miracle on the Sabbath is perpetuated. An English rabbi recently authored a book, discussing this very matter. He argues that the idea of breaking the Sabbath in case of life-death was instituted long before Christ (exemplifying the mercy always fostered by Judaism), and further that Christ's miracle was not of a life-death nature (restoration of ability to walk) and therefore was needlessly and antagonistically performed and could just as well have been postponed to another day.

This argument in a sense, may have validity, except for the obvious question - by what authority was Christ able to perform these miracles? And so it is also with the insinuation that the Apostles attributed passages to Christ and His life. Therefore, it would have to be argued, the Apostles were deceivers - and if so—"what was in it for them?" And back again to the Old Testament prophets~ were their words, too, only to uplift the people's sagging morale? If so, then they too were deceivers.

The following are some reflections on this thinking: "What you call Christianity, I call Prophetic Judaism." Hermann Cohen, Gen. Philosopher-1880-1947 to F. A. Lange, quoted in Modern Philosophies of Judaism, Behman Hse. 1941. J. B. Agis, p. 58.

"To a Jew, the interesting part of Christianity is the part he rejects. The morals are the morals of Judaism.... But the other part - the Hellenistic and pagan and Sacramental—that is new and interesting and strange ... and for the life of us, literally, we and our fathers have not been able to believe it, and we reject it with both hands." Magnes, Judah L., Amer. Rabbi, Pres. of Hebrew Univ. 1877-1948, quoted in For Zion's Sake (N. Bentwich, Jew. (Publ. Soc. 1954) p. 290.

"The Jew believes in the religion of Jesus; he cannot bring himself to accept the religion about Jesus." Charles Prospero Fagnani (non-Jewish Amer. clergyman, 1854-1940) Christian and Jew, 1929, p. 292 (Landman).

"If one cannot say that it was He who made divinity human, I am ready to rank Him among the foremost of those "Who made humanity divine." Joseph Krauskopf (Amer. Rabbi, 1858-1923) in a Rabbi's Impressions, 1901, p. 43.

Christianity." True as this statement appears, as evidenced over many years, it presents many curious points. For it is primarily amongst the Orthodox Jews, or the Hasidim, that so much of the "fundamentalist" ideas concerning the Bible, Revelation, and the Messianic principles have been perpetuated.

But the barrier to Catholic mystical thinking, lies primarily in a lack of communication, caused, I believe very strongly, by terminology. The prophets did indeed proclaim the Virgin Birth, the Passion, the Crucifixion, all integral parts in the life of the Messiah (Christ). But Mushiach, not Christ, is the familiar term. Jesus is Greek for Yeshua; Ruach Blohim (Spirit of God) is recognized more easily than Holy Ghost; and the chances of reciprocal dialogue now are fostered. Immaculate Conception, Baptism, Annunciation, Mystery are but a few of the beautiful, deep meaning terms, to a CATHOLIC, but *not* to the curious Jew. This by no means is to say that only by using the original Hebrew word will he be understood. Rather, it means that a word taken out of its context, translated, and then replaced in its original source, simply does not work—it stands out as "foreign"-*incomprehensible*.

The Jew always has been concerned with his spiritual life.

Today these values occasionally are sadly dismissed as they are unfortunately evidenced amongst society in general, when prosperity exists.

"All values which unfolded in Christianity - love, pity, patience, insight, restraint, the essentials of our civilization are Jewish values" (Sholem Asch, *What I Believe*, 1941, p. 121).

"The blood shed upon the Cross for the redemption of mankind, as well as that which is shed invisibly every day in the chalice of the Sacrament of the Altar, is naturally and supernaturally Jewish blood" (Leon Bloy, *Le Salut par les Jits*, 1892, Pilgrim, 245).

The Jewish resistance to Christ and Catholicism may well be cultivated even outside the spheres of theology. There is much misunderstanding. Too often, in its overt enthusiasm a Catholic publication may repel the curious, seeking Jew. Spinoza, of great mind, admitted ... "These doctrines which certain churches put forward

concerning Christ, I neither affirm *nor deny*, for I *freely* confess that I do not understand them" (Theologico-Political Treatise, 1670, Ch. 1).

To notice a caption - ORTHODOX JEW CONVERTS - is not unusual. But why "Orthodox Jew", when the only thing orthodox about this particular Jew may have been his grandparents, long deceased? Is it of any less value if a perplexed, unbelieving Jew enters the Church? Yes, there have been some of Orthodox convictions who have seen to their fulfillment, and in these cases, the facts warrant recognition of a great accomplishment. But deception innocently hiding behind newspaper sensationalism is far from virtuous, especially in the case of the curious, but far-from-convinced Jew. But then, if Orthodox conversions are infrequent, why concern ourselves about communication and terminology? If Jews are Jews only by the fact of their birth and not by conviction, are there not some then that should be called agnostics or unbelievers? Perhaps. But the most significant problem facing the Jewish Catholic and his parents is the fear of being alone, ostracized by Jew and Catholic alike — - (turncoat, traitor). Ostracism from the convert's family and friends is quite common, whether he or she be the child or the parent. (Parental rejection of the apostate son or daughter, or son-daughter rejection of the apostate father or mother.) Live any way, be anything, *BUT NOT A CATHOLIC*. There is left no other recourse for the agonized family than to turn to unacceptable justifications of this *shameful* deed. Rare indeed is the revealingly, compassionate attitude of a Lord: Mayor Briscoe, whose youngest daughter, Elise, age 21, a convert to Catholicism, entered a Carmelite convent in Clonsela, a suburb of Dublin. He said:

"I have always practiced and preached the right of private conscience and the absolute liberty of the individual. As a practicing Jew (and he IS an Orthodox Jew), I have always been accorded these principles by the people of Ireland. As a parent, and in complete accord with my wife, the happiness of our children has always been our main concern. We both agree that faith by conviction is better than doubtful or no faith."

His only complaint in the matter was that it had

been given wide publicity, and he considered it a private affair.

This kind of reasoning is too often fogged by emotion, and grasping at vain, incoherent explanations prevail. BRAINWASHING, the most popular theory, is followed closely by LOVE-BLINDING BAIT—that is, seduction in a sense, of innocent Jewish males into matrimony by apparently sultry Catholic girls. On at least two occasions I was shocked with unbelief upon the recitation by two basically intelligent people, who unhesitatingly stated that the priests "send out" these Catholic maidens to ensnare these Jewish males, for the Jewish male makes a devotedly good husband, being rarely found in the bar. Then, of course, there is the one that "someone" receives \$1,000 for every Jewish baptism to fulfill a "quota." Moses Hess (*Rome and Jerusalem*, 1862, p. 95) apparently facing his own attempt to escape reality remarked that ... "The converted Jew remains a Jew no matter how much he objects to it." That is precisely the case. *The Jewish Catholic does not deny his Jewish heritage*—he firmly believes he is living the fulfillment of it. It is amazing to discover the satisfaction and comfort nurtured only by un-sympathetic, irrational so-called clarifications culminated in judgments such as "very sick boy" - "impossible - no such thing."

The doubts, lack of faith and familiarization with the prophets, eliminates any theological explanations. Misconceptions of the priesthood, the religious in general, the infallibility of the Popes, the saints, sacramentals, Church-State relationships are but a few of the obstacles repeatedly encountered. Yet, Judaism has its own priesthood (Cohen or Kohayn, Levy, etc.); sacramentals—Friday evening candles as well as the Yizkor or memorial remembrance candles; reverence to Elijah the Prophet (Navi) on welcoming him to the Passover feast; constant bickering over the Theocratic status that the Orthodox believe the State of Israel should have. As for the infallibility of the Pope, an explanation that this lies only in matters of faith and morals is almost anti-climactic. Almost as though it would be easier to believe and more preferable to hear of the authoritative control of men by God through the Pope.