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What is the Significance of the Jews for Christians?*

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What does Christianity mean to a Christian? It is the path to salvation.

This is the *religious* answer. And an ancient Christian maxim states that there is no salvation outside the Church. If the complete self-revelation of God and the exclusive path of salvation which ensues from it can only be discovered within the Church, then what could be beyond its walls if not a religious twilight, thickening into a hostile and impassable darkness?

'The gods of the pagans are demons', and the God of Moses and the prophets is the very same 'Christian' God, the Word, even though He has not yet 'declared Himself' in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. So the Jews faced clear alternatives: either to become Christian or to be apostates from their own, Jewish, God, who made himself known in Jesus. In the Jewish–Christian age there was no alternative.

However, in the course of time, the Jewish–Christian community disappeared without trace. The arrival of Greek Christianity presented the Jews with another choice with regard to the Church: either to remain Jews, or to accept Christianity and thus become apostates from their own Jewish faith. The Pharisee Paul, who became an apostle to the Gentiles, formulated the basic understanding of the place of the Jews (and not only of the Jews) *within* the Church: 'there is no Greek, no Jew ... but Christ is in all' (Colossians 3:11). Any particular culture is of this earth, but the Kingdom of God comes 'from above', and constitutes a call to *overcome* everything that is 'only human'. On the boundary between the Jewish–Christian and Greek epochs in the history of the Church, Paul proclaimed harmony: in the highest synthesis all diversions and this-worldly distinctions are overcome, be they distinctions of race, gender, social status or cultural form. In the light of this kind of attitude to the Kingdom of God the Christian attitude towards Jews seems to be quite clear: there are Jews who are apostles of God and His Christ and there are Jews who are apostates and enemies of Christ. (In recent times we have become well acquainted with fully 'hellenised' Jewish Christians, even among church leaders.)

It is here, it would seem, that the roots of *religious* antisemitism among Christians are to be found. It is not Jewish 'flesh and blood' that they are opposed to, but 'the dark powers of this age', among whom, 'objectively', all non-Christians and anti-Christians are to be found. There is an internal logic in this. If social antisemitism is opposed to the 'flesh', then religious, or 'spiritual' antisemitism, opposed to the 'spirit', is no less a force. Behind the Jews' 'normal human exterior' Christians discern a spirit of opposition to God and hence prepare themselves for 'spiritual

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struggle'. Inasmuch as in the 'Christian era' the 'Christian spirit' has found all possible forms of concrete expression, this 'spiritual struggle' has turned into a physical fight.

A combination of, on the one hand, ideal harmony from on high (in the Church) and, on the other, real opposition on the level of the flesh, which is unwilling to submit to the 'Christian spirit', would very likely have constituted the total 'problem' of Christian–Jewish relations, if it had not been for that same Paul (the Jew Saul). Elsewhere he says something which at first sight is hard to reconcile with the assertion of 'higher harmony'. It is not the mystery of a *spirit* hostile to Christ which he sees in the Jews who have not become Christians, but a mystery of *blood*. 'As regards the Gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers' (Romans 11:28). What is this if not a denial of the unconditional priority of free choice of faith and the blessings which ensue from it – in a word, of the freedom of the spirit in relation to all 'flesh and blood', which, as is well known, are in themselves of no avail? What of spiritual significance and genuine religious content can fathers hand on to their children by 'natural means'? Can it be that gifts and callings do not relate to individuals, as we are accustomed to think, but to genes? Yet these very words from the Epistle to the Romans reveal Paul's own Jewish spirit and show the unique place of the Jews in history. This is what makes the 'Jewish question' a key question for both Christians and the post-Christian world.

Exactly what 'place' do the Jews occupy? It is the mid-point between the universal and the local, between culture at the universal human level and culture at the national level, between 'enlightened' egalitarianism and 'dark' nationalism. By their very existence the Jews expose the untruth and inadequacy – that is to say the relativity – of each of these fundamental poles of human existence. All this is relevant to the post-Christian secular world, in which the Jews remind 'universalists' about the reality of 'blood', and the 'nationalists' about the essential equality of all individuals. Neither of these existential realities can be ignored; each of them must be included in the 'whole'. It is also relevant to the Church with its belief, on the one hand, in the *unity* of all people 'in Christ' and, on the other hand, in local, national-cultural 'incarnations' of Christianity. Jews remind Christians above all that any national form of Christianity is not enough in itself, that in the final analysis the Church of Christ is not confined to any local, concrete, cultural forms. Along with this it must be remembered that a 'civilised', 'democratic', exclusively 'spiritual' or even 'ethical' Christianity is not Christianity in its fullest sense; that it is precisely the flesh which must display the spirit and reality of the Kingdom of God, not exhausting itself as phenomenon of 'bodies', which are naturally at war with one another, but being a manifestation of 'Biblical man' who does not have his home on this earth, but whose home is all around him because he is 'with God'.

In this way Jews show Christians the imperative of absolute equilibrium and also of 'the last things', the eschatological fulfilment (to which all human 'practice' must be directed if it is not to be 'all too human'). While there are Jews on earth, Christians cannot feel completely at home while they remain Christians. Being a Christian in human history, in this world, always means, in some sense, 'being a Jew'.

If this is the case for Christians, however, then what is true for Jews? If Jews are called then their call can only be maximal: a call to move from their first selection by blood (which is indisputable, according to Paul) to the final eschatological realisation of their selection (both within and outside the Church); to be constantly surpassing

themselves, to be endlessly growing and overcoming all established forms, conditions and definitions – in a word it is a call to openness, which is made possible and strengthened by just that 'exclusivity', of selection, blood and fate. The 'degree' they have been given demands of them that they be 'more than Jews'. If Christians, because of the Jews, cannot 'settle', then can Jews themselves really 'settle'? If Jews remain true to their God, then their path is from a 'national' God (or rather from the many national gods) to One God: to the God first of the Jews and then of the Christians and of every individual (compare Romans 2:9–10). The significance of the first selection, that of being chosen by God, consists in moving through separation in order finally to reach a truly transcendental universality: the Kingdom of the One God.

What does all this mean for Christians themselves? By looking at things in this way, they can understand how it is that Jesus is a Jew and *therefore* the Son of God, how it is that He is the Son of God and *therefore* a Jew by birth. Chapter 11 of the Epistle to the Romans ends with Paul proclaiming the measureless riches and authority of God and how incomprehensible and unfathomable His ways are. The Jews are outside the Church but are 'the beloved of God'. This too is the Good News about God! The true God is the Living God and He is bigger than 'Christianity'. No limited and established institution, not even the 'Church', can confine Him within itself. Characteristics, property, traditions, convictions, ideas can be 'owned', but the Truth, which is God, cannot.

In the old era of 'Christian states' Christians pronounced against the Jews essentially the very same sentence which had been pronounced against the Christians when they were being persecuted: *non licet vos esse* – you must not exist. 'Because you killed Christ and did not repent even though Christ was the King of all the kings of the earth, now there is no place for you among us.' The situation has changed, with the collapse of 'Christian powers', but this certainly does not mean that Christians are in some way 'spiritually superior' to the Jews for the reason mentioned above ('you killed Christ'). In changing their attitude towards the Jews Christians are not being asked to 'betray the Truth'. They are being required not to 'embody the Christian spirit in weapons' and, consequently, to repent and reverently perceive the 'incomprehensible ways of God' in history.

It may be only now that Christians are able to see clearly that the Church is open to everyone and that the mystery of Christ and the Spirit is being accomplished within it. However, outside the walls of the Church, in the non-Christian world, different Divine mysteries are being accomplished, and one of these which Christians know about – must know about – is the *mystery of blood*, blood which the 'Christian' God himself chose. He chooses and cares for whomever he wants, and no one has authority over Him.

Jews are Jews by blood; they are called by God to become more than their blood, but not less. For Christians, the 'Jewish question' is one of the mysteries of God which will be revealed at the eschatological fulfilment of history. This is the teaching of the Apostle Paul.

By their very presence, then, 'Jewish apostates' save Christians from becoming themselves apostates from the Living God of Abraham and Jesus Christ by creating 'idols' of all kinds of post-Christian needs. Or rather, they are capable of saving Christians: woe to the Christians if they do not save themselves through the Jews. For 'through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles' (Romans 11:11).

(Translated from the Russian by Emma Watkins.)