

THE PLACE OF JEWS IN THE LITURGY

ONE of the greatest changes which in recent years has taken place in Church life is due to the fact that the liturgy is no longer regarded merely as the order of the Church's public and common worship, but as one of the most important expressions of the life of the Mystical Body of Christ. On the other hand, we realise that the liturgy is not only a matter of spiritual meditation, but also a source of practical information on the full reality of our life as children of the election. It could not be expected that this twofold discovery would reveal its full significance at once, yet it is surprising to see how frequently discussions on vital problems of Church life are still carried on without consulting the definite authoritative teaching contained thereon in the liturgy. With regard to the Jewish problem, it is evidently due to the almost overwhelming influence of excellent studies by non-Catholic writers that Catholic authors draw only from the source of Holy Scripture and of theological speculation. Thus Fr. Przywara, S.J., Professor Erik Peterson, Léon Bloy,¹ Jacques Maritain and many others have written on Christian-Jewish relations without making reference even to the most obvious liturgical text concerned with Jews, namely the Solemn Supplications of Good Friday.

After praying for the various grades of the hierarchy, for the absent members of the congregation, and for the catechumens, heretics and schismatics, these Supplications conclude with petitions for the Jews and the Heathens. The Solemn Supplications are the last relic of a Bidding Prayer originally recited at the end of the Mass of the Catechumens where, to this day, the priest begins with a 'Let us pray,' although the subsequent Offertory is not a prayer but a simple versicle. According to Pope St. Celestine this prayer can be traced back to Apostolic times. When the distinction between the Mass of the Catechumens and the Mass of the Faithful was lost, the Supplications fell into disuse, but in later years, when the Celtic-Teutonic nations revived the sense of reality expressed by this prayer, it reappeared under the form of the General Prayer now said in many countries before or during the Parochial Mass, and also in many Protestant liturgies. However, the petition for the Jews is, and apparently always was, a distinctive feature of the liturgy for

¹ In his diary for July 11th, 1892, Bloy, however, makes a reference to the connection between the Christian and the ancient Jewish liturgy.

Holy Week when the Church specially commemorates the prayer of Jesus Crucified for his friends and his enemies. (It has also been preserved in the Anglican liturgy which prescribes for Good Friday a prayer begging that 'the Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks, may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites.')

The antiquity of the Solemn Supplications is proved by the enlarged form of the summons *Oremus* initiating the actual prayers. With the petition for the Jews, this initiation is comparatively short :

'Let us pray also for the unbelieving Jews : that our Lord God would withdraw the veil from their hearts : that they also may acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Whilst in all the other nine petitions, after this initiation there follows the summons 'Let us kneel,' the omission of this genuflexion in the petition for the Jews is perhaps the most noted feature in the liturgical prayer for the Jews. Since Amalarius (*De eccl. off.*, I, 13), this omission is said to be due to the desire not to commemorate the mocking genuflexion made by the Jews before Jesus. It is a remarkable sign of anti-Jewish bias that for almost a thousand years this statement was accepted by liturgists (right down to such eminent scholars as the great Fr. Anselm Schott, O.S.B.) without noting that the genuflexions recorded by Matthew xxvii, 29, and Mark xv, 19, were not made by the *Jews* but by the Roman soldiers, as a definitely *anti-Jewish* gesture, to ridicule the belief in the kingship of the son of David. The omission of the genuflexion in the petition for the Jews is of a fairly late date and probably connected with the ill-feeling arising against the Jews after they had been authorised by the secular powers to lend money at interest. Since the first Council of Carthage, Christians had been debarred from this line of business. Whilst all other trades were closed to the Jews, this new opening made them a very lucrative source of taxation by the State. Forbidden as they were to take securities, the Jews took exorbitant interests, and it is well known how the Christian people used to deal with their creditors whenever their claims became too burdensome. Even when attracted by the still greater profits to be made by non-Jews and in spite of Church law Christians engaged in money-lending, 'the Jew' remained the typical representative of the usurer. To this day, on September 28th, the Franciscans celebrate the feast of Bl. Bernardino da Feltre, who according to the Breviary 'confirmed against the impudent usuries of the Jews the *Montes Pietatis* throughout Italy.'²

² See my article, 'Men and Money in the Liturgy,' The Irish Rosary, Sept.-Oct., 1942.

The 'unbelief' of the Jews is also referred to in the actual prayer of the Solemn Supplications :

'Almighty and eternal God, who dost not exclude even the unbelieving Jews from thy mercy : hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of this people : that by acknowledging the light of thy truth, which is Christ, they may be brought out of their darkness.'

In both instances the liturgy uses the word '*perfidia*,' which, unlike our word 'perfidy,' does not imply the idea of personal baseness. The same word also occurs in the Order of Baptism of an adult person, where it equally refers to the 'Hebrew superstition' and the 'distorted sect of Mohammedan infidelity.' In the Solemn Supplications (whose antiquity is further proved by the absence of any reference to the Mohammedans), the Jews are considered only as a religious body. The petition for the Jews is preceded by petitions for those who, though for external or internal reasons separated from the Church, actually or virtually belong to her, and it is followed by the petition for the pagans, that is to say those who, having not yet heard of Christ, do not believe in Him. The Jews are that important group of non-members of the Church who, whilst having heard of Christ, have rejected him. 'Perfidy' is something else than 'infidelity.' Whilst it is almost natural that those who have not yet heard of Christ are still un-con-verted, those who refuse the message of salvation are nothing but per-verse. The exciting mystery of post-Christian Judaism is embodied in this interpretation, but this very 'perfidy' is the characteristic of all forms of post-Christian religion or pseudo-religion, and it is one of the ironies of history that, in consideration of the fact that the majority of the leaders and followers of Neo-paganism are baptised and even Catholic persons, it should be rather referred to as Neo-Judaism. The liturgical tradition enshrines the definite teaching that all who turn away from Christ share 'the murder' which according to St. Augustine (Office of Good Friday) the Jews committed by 'the sword of their tongues.' According to St. Ambrose (Office for the First Sunday of August), 'there are many among us' who show the spiritual characteristics of Jews, and in this sense we may give a rather topical interpretation to St. Augustine's words read in the Office of the fifth day within the Octave of the Anniversary of the Dedication of a Church :

'Nowadays, when churches are filled with believers, do we imagine that this makes the Jews rejoice? Not only do they not rejoice, but they are put to confusion . . . Let Judas that sold

Christ groan, and the Jews that bought him blush; both buyer and sellers in that wicked bargain are condemned.'

However, the unique position occupied by the Jews in all periods of history and through all parts of the world is expressive of the fact that their 'perfidy' is infinitely deeper than that of Mahomedans or modern 'Post-Christians.' When we survey the close inter-linking between the Old and the New Testament (as expressed by the prophecies read on the Vigil of Easter and Pentecost), the extensive use made of the Old Testament in the daily prayer of the Church and the connection between the Mass and the Jewish Sacrifice-Service (a connection much closer than between the Mass and, say, the service according to the Book of Common Prayer) or between the Jewish Prayer and the Divine Office, or when we remember that in the liturgy patriarchs and prophets, let alone Jewish-born Christians, occupy the highest ranks of Saints—then we realise the whole extent of Jewish 'perversion.' Indeed the Church also prays for Mohammedans and Neo-Pagans, but these are merely her wards. The Jews are her legitimate children or, as medieval sculptors tell us, the Synagogue is a sister of the Ecclesia.³ In the before-mentioned lessons taken from St. Ambrose we find a genuine expression of Christian amazement at Israel's mysteriously hard fate:

'The Jews have a truly fervent zeal for God, but since they have not knowledge, their very zeal and fear do cause them to do things contrary to God's will.'

This teaching was confirmed by the Council of Trent when stating in the Decree on Justification that 'even' the Jews when fulfilling the letter of the law cannot be justified without grace.

The foundation for this unique fate of Israel lies in the natural and historical sphere as well as in the religious and supernatural. It is a strange fact that the passage (Genesis, c. 17) relating the Covenant of Circumcision is never read in the liturgy. The only reference thereto is found in the Order of the Dedication of a Church when the joining of two walls is compared with the joining of the Covenant of Circumcision with the Covenant of Uncircumcision in the Church (*cf.* Rom. ii, 5, 6). If in the Breviary the beginning of Lent did not break off the readings from the book of Genesis, chap. 17, would be read on Ash Wednesday. The omission of the reading of Gen. 17 from the Office probably accounts for the neglect of what we could call the natural foundation of the Jewish problem. On the other hand, the political aspects of Judaism are overshadowed

³ 'As of old time the Synagogue, so now does the Church venerate Michael as 'the watcher and defender' (Breviary).

by the spiritual interpretation given to the First Book of Kings when read during the Octave of Corpus Christi and even more so during the Octave of the Sacred Heart. These historical books, however, are the main source for Catholic teaching on the Jewish problem in its present-day form. We have not only become more conscious and cognizant of the natural and historical foundations of human life, but we are also more prepared to accept these foundations as they are, without minimising, by means of spiritual interpretation, the responsibility thereby laid upon us. In fact, when considering these natural and historical foundations we understand the full reality of the collective responsibility which distinguishes the Jewish people from all other nations and denominations, and of the recognised teaching of the Church that the Day of Judgment will be announced by the collective conversion of the Jewish people (St. Jerome in the Office for the Feast of the Holy Innocents). Present-day conditions show that in the history of Jewish-Christian relations we have failed in the attempt to supersede the natural and historical facts by an entirely supernatural interpretation, thus making this interpretation a frail and pale work of imagination.

Apart from the Apostolic times (e.g. the tradition of SS. James and Martha), only a few liturgical references are made to Jewish-Christian relations. The close connection between Jews and Christians during the period of persecutions may be seen from the fact that the bodies of Christian martyrs such as SS. Vitalis and Agricola were sometimes buried in the Jews' burying-places, but the Breviary hastens to add that in later years these relics were taken to 'a honorable sepulchre.' In the historical lessons for the feast of St. Victor we read that under this Pope Easter was appointed to a date which would no longer suggest that 'the Christians copied the Jews.' Of St. Cyril of Jerusalem we hear that he prevented the Jews from executing the impious Emperor's order to rebuild the Temple. St. Cyril of Alexandria caused 'to be expelled from the city those Jews who had been induced by rage to plan a massacre of the Christians.'⁴ St. John Capistran was appointed inquisitor general against the Saracens and Jews, St. Vincent Ferrer was reputed for his vigorous refutation of the *perfidia Judaeorum* and the errors of the Saracens,

⁴ It is a strange coincidence that on November 9th, one of the blackest days in modern Jewish history, the Roman Martyrology commemorates the crucifixion in Syria of the Image of the Saviour by the Jews. This image poured forth blood so plentifully that the Churches of the East and West received freely therefrom. The local cultus of Dominic de Val in Saragossa, Hugh and Wernen of Bacharach, all three boys said to have been kidnapped and killed by the Jews, likewise originated in connection with anti-Jewish feeling spread by the Crusaders.

and St. Lawrence of Brindisi preached to the Hebrews in their own tongue. The only friendly reference made to Jews is found in the lessons for the feast of St. Jerome, who witnessed that on his pilgrimage to Palestine he got the help of the most learned of the Jews for the understanding of the Holy Scripture.' So also the early Cistercians consulted Jewish Rabbis on the original Hebrew text of the Bible.

There can be no doubt that since the secular emancipation of the Jews, the problem of Judaism has been newly visualised in its full natural and supernatural significance. In the liturgy, the most conspicuous sign of this revival was the introduction in 1876 of the cause of a Jewish convert. If the Ven. Paul Liberman should be raised to the altars he would be the first Jewish-born person to attain that honour since the days of Pope Evaristus. The Ven. Paul Liberman was the founder of two congregations bearing the name of the Immaculate Heart, and it is perhaps one of the least known topical aspects of the recent spreading of the devotion to the Most Pure Heart that it is the special patron of, if I may say so, modern Jewish-Christian relations. Accordingly the only special prayer for Jews now universally said, outside the Solemn Supplications, is a short indulgenced prayer where the Patriarchs, Apostles and the Immaculate Heart are invoked that through their intercession 'the remnant of Israel may come to a knowledge of our only Saviour Jesus Christ.'

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CORRESPONDENCE

THE LATE ERIC GILL

SIR,—I am endeavouring to make a collection of my late husband's letters to his friends and acquaintances, so that a selection from them may ultimately be published in book form.

I should therefore be most grateful if anyone who possesses letters from Eric Gill would send them to me c/o Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 30 Bedford Square, London, W.C.1. They will all be acknowledged, carefully copied and returned as quickly as possible.

Yours faithfully,

MRS. ERIC GILL.

Pigotts, High Wycombe.