

COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN THE VOCATIONS OF JEWS AND GENTILES IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST¹

By Jean-Miguel Garrigues

The Jews not only enjoyed the privilege of being the first in history to accede to the faith and to baptism in Jesus. Many indications in the New Testament show that in the Apostolic Church they also have a role of structural mediation for the incorporation of others into Christ. The olive-tree mentioned by Paul in *Romans* ch. 11, seems to be the people of Israel as it is united to the Messiah in the New Covenant. It is a nation whose “roots are holy” (Rom 11), from the Patriarchs up until Jesus; its “first fruits are holy” (Rom 11, 6) in the person of the “saints of Jerusalem” (Acts 9, 13; Rom 15, 26), that is to say, in the person of the Jewish believers in Jesus. Since both the roots and the first fruits are Jewish, the mediation of the Jews on behalf of the Gentiles seems to be, in Paul's eyes, structurally connected to the mediation of Jesus. According to Paul, if a Gentile is incorporated by baptism as a member of Christ, he is at the same time grafted onto the cultivated olive tree “among its natural branches, so that he can benefit, together with these, from the root and the sap of the olive tree” (Rom 11, 17), that is to say, in order to benefit from the fulfillment in Jesus of the Promise which Israel possesses. And so, we must ask: Is this mediation of the Jews who believe in Christ, a structural dimension of the Church, or is it simply an historical circumstance related to the origins of the Christian Church? This is certainly a most delicate point that requires careful discernment in our Christian faith.

It is clear that the first community of the Church was made up of Jews, and that the Gentiles who converted, were associated with them. This was true both in Israel and in the Diaspora, where, let us not forget it, Paul always visited the synagogues first and addressed himself to the Jews, some of whom he converted (cf. Rom 11, 14). If those Jews had failed to believe in Jesus, there

¹ This text is taken and translated from my book *Le Saint-Esprit sceau de la Trinité: le Filioque et l'originalité trinitaire de l'Esprit dans sa personne et dans sa mission*, coll. « Cogitatio fidei » n°276, éd. du Cerf, Paris 2011, pp. 125-128 et pp. 142-145.

would have been no Church at all; this is a point on which all Christians agree. But was this founding role a mere chance occurrence of history, or is it really a structural part of Christ's mediation with regard to his entire Body? It seems difficult to conceive that the very strong words of Paul concerning the Jews and Gentiles in the Church can be reduced to a simple metaphor, intended only as a description of the concrete historical situation at the beginning of the apostolic mission. We need to reread Paul's words in connection with the question we have raised.

Paul bases himself on what Christ said to him during his apparition on the road to Damascus. That was where Paul first received his mission as an apostle: "so that the nations to whom I am sending you... may obtain, by faith in me (Jesus), the forgiveness of their sins, and a portion in the inheritance of those who have been sanctified" (Acts 26, 17-18). Paul continually repeats the same idea in his own words: "The Gentiles are admitted to the same inheritance [the one intended for the Jews and which the Jews who believe in Christ have actually received], they (the Gentiles) are members of the same Body" (Eph 3, 6). The Gentiles, who up until now were only "strangers and sojourners", (Eph 2, 19), being separated from Christ (without a Messiah), excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of the promise" (Eph 2, 12), have henceforth become in Christ "fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God" (Eph 2, 19). Indeed, "the Father has qualified (them) to share in the inheritance of the saints" (Col 1, 12). For the Body of Christ that is the Church, the Jewish believers are the heirs of the promises made by God to Israel. And thus, they have, somehow, by the very fact of their Election, a role in communicating God's blessing in Christ to the Gentiles who convert. In the Church, they constitute a living witness to the way in which "Christ became a minister to the circumcised, in order to show God's truthfulness" (Rom 15, 8): thanks to this faithfulness of the Lord towards them (the people of Israel), "the nations glorify God for his mercy" (Rom 15, 9). And thus, in Paul's view, the double vocation of the Jews and the Gentiles remains at the very center of the unique Body of Christ. The way in which Paul expresses himself is significant: according to him, the duality between Jews and Gentiles is not erased purely and simply in the unity of the Church: Christ wants to "create *both* of them in

himself as one New Man” (Eph 2, 15) and to “reconcile *both* of them in one Body” (Eph 2, 16); and, above all, “through him we *both* have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph 2, 18).

Paul considers this association with Christ's mediation to be a structuring dimension of the Church. Indeed, he does say that in virtue of baptism “*you are all* sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, (...) neither male nor female (...) for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3, 26-28). Yes, but this holds true only with regard to the baptismal gift of grace by faith, which brings salvation: “for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek: all have the same Lord, who bestows the riches (of his grace) upon all who call upon him” (Rom 10, 12; cf. Rom 3, 22-24). By the same token, there is longer “either male or female” with regard to the baptismal priesthood. However there still remains a distinction between the vocations, missions and ministries of men and women, a distinction that the Catholic Church jealously conserves. Similarly, the distinction between the vocations and missions of the Jew and the Gentile continues to exist in the Church.

This distinction of ecclesial vocations and missions seems to have, in Paul's view, a structural role. In his letters, Paul without hesitation employs an inclusive “we”, when referring to salvation, which is common to Jewish and Gentile believers. And thus, when evoking baptismal typology in his letter to the Corinthians, where the vast majority of the faithful were Gentiles, Paul, in order to demonstrate that they too have been included in Israel by Christ, expresses himself in this way: “*Our* fathers were all under the cloud; and all passed through the sea” (1 Cor 10, 1). On the other hand, when he explains the forms of mediation involved in the realization of God's salvation plan, he distinguishes without hesitation, the terms “we [the Jews], and “the rest of you” [the Gentiles] (Eph 1, 11.13). Further on in this same epistle, he says to the converted Gentiles “Remember that at one time, you, the Gentiles...” (Eph 2, 11). And this distinction holds true not only for the past, the time that preceded their entry into the Church. It continues to exist in the present life of the Christian community: “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles” (Rm 11, 13).

Today, the Messianic Jews who share with us the New

Testament faith in Jesus as the accomplishment of God's Promises, are confronting the Church of Christ with the following decisive question: is the mediation exercised by the Jews at the birth of the Church, a mere historical incident, or does it have a deeper significance, and does it represent a structural element for the Church? If it is indeed structural, then it must be permanent. But, at first glance, it would seem to have disappeared with the apostolic or sub-apostolic generation, when the Judeo-Christian community of Jerusalem held the role of the Mother-Church.

We can find elements for a response to this important question in recent historical studies. These have shown the great extent to which the sacramental and liturgical rites, as well as the priestly institutions of the sub-apostolic Church, the very "frühkatholischen" elements that would designate her from the second century as the "Catholic Church", received the structural imprint of Judeo-Christian models which can come only from the original apostolic community. Unfortunately, starting in the second century with the influx of the Gentiles into the Church, the Judeo-Christians became marginalized and they gradually disappeared from the life of the Church. Therefore, we should perhaps ask ourselves whether this treasure of Christian community and spiritual life which goes back to the apostles, and which the Catholic Church conserves as the apple of its eye, can really yield its full meaning and all its fruit for the benefit of all Christians, without being assumed by the Jews who believe in Jesus as the accomplishment of the messianic promises carried by the people of Israel.

On an even deeper level, we need to ask ourselves whether the multitude of believers coming from the Nations can fully express its own baptismal incorporation into the Messiah of Israel, without taking root, through the believing Jews, in the people of Israel, which God preserves as the trustee of the Promise for a final assumption in view of the glorious Coming of the Messiah (Rm 11, 15). "If you want to boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you" (Rom 11, 18). The Catholic Church can only respond to these questions with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit's mission is to "introduce [the Church] into the entire truth" (Jn 16, 13), and to glorify Christ in her through fellowship between a diversity of members.

The complementarity existing within the communion of the apostles appears already in the way Peter exercises his ministry as Pastor over the entire flock (cf. Jn 21, 17; Mt 16, 18). The power of keys, which Peter received first alone from Christ, (cf. Jn 21, 17; Mt 16, 18), was also given by Jesus to all the Twelve, with Peter included among them (cf. Mt 18, 18). So Peter “commanded that baptism be given” (Acts 10, 48) to the first pagans whom he had converted in the house of Cornelius, and thus he received them into the Church. When he returned home, however, he accounted for what he did before “the apostles and brothers of Judea” (Ac 11, 1). Despite his universal mission, which inspires him to address his first epistle to the “exiles of the Dispersion” (1 P 1, 1) that are scattered in various churches, he nonetheless leaves James in charge of the community of Jerusalem (cf. Ac 12, 17; 15, 13; Ga 1, 19).

In a similar fashion, Paul says, that during his second visit to Jerusalem “when they saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised, *just as* Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, - for He who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me *also* for the Gentiles - and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James, Kephias and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (Gal 2, 7-9). His responsibility for the entire flock (cf. Jn 21, 15-17) does not prevent Peter from welcoming into communion the apostolic mission that Paul had received from Christ concerning the Gentiles, mapping out, as it were, the general modalities of their two respective missions with regard to announcing the Gospel to the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Church of Rome, through the preaching and the martyrdom of the two principal apostles (“*principes apostolorum*”), was not only graced to be the Church whose bishop sits on the see of Peter as the universal pastor; in addition, as the Church of Peter and Paul, this Church is the carrier of the two modalities which characterize respectively the mission of these two apostles: towards the Jews, who constitute the “first fruits” (Rom 11, 16) of the Church in-rooted through them in the people of Israel, and towards the universality of the Nations. Now it is true that, for

many centuries, Peter's mission towards the circumcised only manifested itself in a certain protection that the popes often granted to Jews who were persecuted in Christian nations². However since Pope John XXIII, it seems that this Petrine charisma is being revived among Peter's successors. The Church of Rome, as the Church of Peter, ought to ensure, and very often has effectively ensured, that the Catholic Church breathes "with both of its lungs" (John-Paul II), represented by the traditions of the East and the West. But is it not true that the Jews and the Gentiles represent even more fundamental ways of living according to the faith in the Good News, two ways that belong to the apostolic structure of the Church?

Now the two modes of the apostolic mission of the Church represented by Peter and Paul have definitively marked the Church of Rome with a vocation that simultaneously causes her to turn towards the universality of the Nations, while she herself is being referred to Jerusalem. It is no mere coincidence that the book of the Acts of the Apostles begins in Jerusalem and ends with the arrival of Paul in Rome, the city symbolizing pagan universality, and where we also find Peter, who sends his First Epistle from the Church "which is in *Babylon*" (1 P 5, 13). All this seems to indicate that the full apostolic mission of Peter and Paul, which has come from Israel, had to be maintained until "the end of the time of the nations" (Lc 21, 24; cf. Rom 11, 25), in the very midst of the "great Prostitute" (Rev 17, 1.9), from whence faith sends forth the impetus for missions, while waging the combat of martyrdom against all the different forms of paganism among the Gentiles³.

The Church of Rome, marked for all times by the charisma, the testimony and the blood of Peter and Paul, is referred to as the "*Apostolic See*" not because it is the Church of the capital of the Roman Empire, but rather because this empire, under Nero and Domitian, became the first of many attempts to constitute a

² Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether the bitter disappointment, manifested by many Jews, years after the death of Pius XII, over what appears to them as his "silence" in the face of the Shoa, might not express the awareness that they were, as Jews, in some sense "entitled" to a greater solicitude from the Pope.

³ See the significant text of Emmanuel Lévinas given below, telling how he became aware of this struggle against paganism within the Church itself.

false universality reminiscent of the tower of Babel, and pointing ahead towards the Antichrist, something the Book of Revelation clearly indicates in chapters 17 and 18. Far from being either the capital of a particular region, or simply the “Patriarchate of the West”, the Roman Church is the hub or junction point for all the articulations of universal communion. Junction point between East and West, she succeeded for several centuries in resisting pressure to introduce the *Filioque* into the *Nicene Creed*. She resisted on the grounds of respect for the symbol of faith professed together with the East at the early ecumenical councils. Ever since the actual outbreak of the schism between East and West, she has been seeking, right up to the present day, (and with greater or lesser success), to heal it. Rome does not belong to the West. There is in her very foundation, and in her ancient tradition, just as much of the East as there is of the West.

Even more so, and in ways that God will manifest, Rome must not belong exclusively to the Christian Gentility. As the guardian of Peter and Paul's double mission, which both comes from and points back to Jerusalem, the Church of Rome must see to it that, in Jesus, the Gentiles with their infinite variety are grafted in the unique “root which carries [them]” (Rom 11, 18), this root being the Election of Israel. The Church is “*ex gentibus*” but not “*de gentibus*”; that is to say, she is *drawn from* the Nations but she is not the Church of *the Nations*. She is instead the messianic *Qahal* of Israel, the people of God that has become, in Jesus and according to the promise of God, “an assembly of nations” (Gen 35, 11).

This is just one more example of how, in the history of salvation, the work of God, which has a universal significance and aim, passes through that which is particular: the election (choice) of Israel for the primacy in the fulfillment of Promise, the election (choice) of the Church of Rome for the primacy in Church's communion. It is according to a very specific will of Christ that Paul learns, in a vision, that he is destined to “bear witness in Rome *as* he had done in Jerusalem” (Ac 23, 11). This little word “as”, which links Rome to Jerusalem, indicates that the witness which Paul must give there concerning Christ, has a particular importance in the plan of God. It seems to be distinct from the witnessing which Paul gave in the other cities of the Gentiles, and it is referred directly to Jerusalem.

**THE HIDDEN DRAMA
THAT THE CHURCH CARRIED WITHIN HERSELF⁴**

(CONCERNING THE DEATH OF
POPE PIUS XI: February 1939)⁵

By Emmanuel Lévinas

The very sincere emotions aroused in the Jewish world by the death of His Holiness Pius XI are not only caused by our admiration for the great figure of the departed Pontiff. He represented, it is true, a “remarkable moment for the human conscience”; but our gratitude towards a man who had the courage to speak out in favor of the truth, is not the only motive for our present sorrow. We have been touched on an even deeper level. It is as if other bonds connected us to all that he represented, as if we had been hit in our most intimate self.

Such an attitude would be inexplicable, if Christianity still represented for us, that which it had for a long time seemed to be, that which it remained in our memories. Persecuted for centuries by Nations who claimed to be Christian, Judaism could only distinguish with great difficulty in the severe countenance of the Triumphant Church, facial features of a religion that had once been its own offshoot. It is not as if suffering had clouded up its mind, or provoked hatred or a thirst for vengeance against those inflicting the pain. The world, in its aspirations, its morality, its governing forces, has been making a continual affirmation of its pagan origins. It seemed to dominate the Church rather than to be dominated by her. The Church as an institution, marvelously built on the foundations of medieval civilization, all too carefully dissimulated the war she was waging against barbarity. Out of

⁴ In *Paix et Droit*, revue de l'Alliance, 1939, reprinted in the *Cahiers de l'Herne*, « Emmanuel Lévinas », under the direction de Catherine Chalier and Miguel Abensour, Paris 1991, pp. 151-152, and later in the review of “Amitiés judéo-chrétiennes” *Sens*, 9/10, 1996, pp. 365-367.

⁵ It should be recalled that in 1937, Pius XI had issued the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* condemning the Nazi ideology of racism and totalitarianism. This encyclical condemned particularly the paganism of National Socialist ideology, the myth of race and blood, and fallacies in the Nazi conception of God. One year later, the Pope firmly resisted the anti-Semitic legislation introduced by the Fascist government in Italy.

this arose Israel's sense of solitude, which is perhaps the best possible description of its feeling about life throughout the ages. The cross that surmounted the cathedrals surmounted also the towns. It symbolized a world that Israel did not understand.

Israel did not understand, because Judaism is, in the final analysis, nothing other than anti-paganism. It is, in fact, the very epitome of anti-paganism. But it is not opposed to any theoretical dogmas, and its hostility to polytheism is not its most original contribution. The natural light (of the intellect) was able to attain the idea of one God without the help of revelation. Jewish anti-paganism is, instead a way of living and of feeling. It rejects an entire series of difficultly definable elements, which all bathe in a common atmosphere. In this atmosphere, Israel immediately detects something alien. It relates to anything connected with a natural blossoming of being, of being that takes pleasure in its own nature. It involves things such as the cult of earthly power and grandeur, the idea that it is legitimate for force to impose itself as force, legitimate to love or hate spontaneously, to get up on one's horse, to wage war with joy. It is the gift of the conviction that one is well installed in the "real world". All these notions belong to what, since Nietzsche, everyone is agreed to call the "morality of the masters", a moral system which, even more than "free-thinking" or atheism, "emancipates" people from religious anxiety. Perhaps these notions are not without a certain grandeur and noblesse. But, when confronted with them, the message of Israel appears as a paradox and as folly. It is indeed folly to cling dearly to an Election which only manifests itself through suffering, folly to put oneself at the very center of world history without ever having had real political independence, folly to separate human dignity from power or success.

The accession to power in Germany of racism, and the prestige that it is acquiring in the world, reveal themselves to be, in the face of the Jewish conscience, the apotheosis of everything that, in the world, is diametrically opposed to Judaism. That is because they sum up and crystallize the "morality of the masters". This system of values has always been latent in the universe, but now, it has become fully aware of how much its own existence implies the rejection of the call issued by Judaism. At present, it has openly avowed this rejection and it is arrogantly proud to do so. And thus, despite all the considerations about

the economic, political and social causes of national-socialism, in the light of which, the racial persecutions might seem to be a mere accident in the tormented life of the modern world, the Jews have the vague intuition that Hitlerism is like a reminder of their vocation and their destiny. Once again they are situating their misfortunes in the perspectives of holy history.

But the triumph of national-socialism also renders the religious mission of the Church comprehensible to us. As the world, essentially insubordinate to the Bible, returns to its natural condition, the secret drama that the Church carried within herself comes out into broad daylight. Her pact with the profane world was in fact a war against it. Under her cloak, which has once again been torn apart, we can perceive the indelible marks of her Jewish birth. That which we already knew from the history of her origins, that which theology teaches us about her task among the nations, we can suddenly grasp it all in an immediate, tangible and direct way.

True, our own road leads elsewhere. We pass along side the Cross; we do not go to it. But the sacred aversion, which the Tharaud brothers thought they observed one day in a certain child of the Polish ghetto, we do not experience it when “the shadow of the Cross” covers us one brief instant. And, in an increasingly hostile world, in which swastikas are cropping up everywhere, it is towards the Cross with branches straight and pure that we now lift up our eyes.