MARITAIN AND HEBRAISM

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Introduction

I want to congratulate the International Jacques Maritain Institute on its thirty-fifth anniversary and to commend the Institute and my friend Roberto Papini for the fine work that has been accomplished during these years. I have benefited from participating several times in the Institute's activities and programs, which I believe continue an advance in line with the spirit of our incomparable older brother in these labors, Jacques Maritain. For these and many other reasons, I was happy that Professor Papini asked to speak to you today about Maritain and Hebraism. In 1994, I edited a volume, *Jacques Maritain and the Jews,* a collection of papers presented at one of the conferences of our American Maritain Association and published by the University of Notre Dame Press. And it was a pleasure for me to look back into this topic after several more years of acquaintance with Maritain and the world in which he wrote.

As most of the people in this room probably know, Maritain was perhaps the most influential figure in the twentieth century in altering relations between Christians and Jews. He was a young man when the Dreyfus Affair was troubling France and came out immediately on the side of truth and justice. He worked early against anti-Semitism in France and elsewhere, started relief efforts and right organizations to defend Jews being pressured by Fascists and Nazi regimes prior to World War II. After that war, as ambassador to the Vatican, he helped advance a number of initiatives that came to fruition in the document *Nostrae Aetate* at the Second Vatican Council. There is probably no one person more responsible for the shift in Christian – especially Catholic – and Jewish relations. Those efforts were important in the past and, as I hope to suggest, may have some importance for us at present as well.

Three Areas of Interest

I intend to look at three large dimensions of Maritain's relationship with the Jewish people and the whole question of Hebraism. We should keep constantly in mind as we go through the various dimensions of this material that he described himself in 1967 – which is to say near the end of his long life, as "a Jew by love, bound in my flesh and my sensitivity to the tribes of Israel and to their destiny here below."[1]

This remark obviously refers to his extraordinary closeness to his wife, Raïssa, and the path they traversed together into a Catholic faith that regarded itself, even as they were led to baptism by Léon Bloy, as in a concrete continuity with the people of the Old Testament. In fact, it was Bloy, the author of that difficult, disturbing, and sometimes misleading work, *Le salut par les Juifs*, who told the Maritains precisely that they were not abandoning the Jewish heritage in becoming Christians. Jacques Maritain also

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[1] "Lettre à un juif chrétien" in *Cahiers Jacques Maritain*, p. 23 (October 1991).

found in Bloy his own repugnance towards the bourgeoisie, which he regarded as part of sacred history: "Christians have abandoned the poor – the poor among the nations: the Jews – and Poverty of soul: authentic Reason. They fill me with horror."[2]

So we can already begin to identify in these brief remarks I have quoted the three elements I wish to examine here: first, overarching and enveloping all these other issues, Maritain's organic, so to speak, relationship with the Hebrew people and their travails through the facts of his familial life; second, the theological and historical meaning of the Jewish people both in themselves and for Christians – theological *and* historical because Jewish sacred history presents for Christians and Jews alike considerations for the work of God *in history*; and finally, we want to look at the concrete solidarity of Christians and Jews "here below," which for us will mean also looking into the question of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and the founding of the state of Israel, which Maritain welcomed and supported.

Organic Bonds

Let us begin with what may seem a merely accidental detail in Maritain's biography, his concrete attachment via Raïssa with the Jewish people. For someone who does not believe in random events, such connections cannot be purely casual. And controversial as this way of looking at things may be for some, it may very well be that Maritain's marriage to a woman of Russian Jewish background led him into a deeper appreciation of the concrete contribution of the Hebrews to world history. It is also significant that Raïssa was of *Russian Jewish* background. Had she been from one of the more secularized French Jewish families, Jacques may very well not have perceived the full Otherness of one side of the Jewish heritage. As it turned out, though Raïssa's family had detached itself from its roots in moving to France, it still maintained memories of the pious *hasidim* particularly her grandfather, who seemed to be a connection to a long history stretching back into the mists of time.

In an entry in his *Carnet de Notes* from as early as 1906, Maritain described his wife's virtues and immediately connected them with larger questions:

> We know that the true Jew is not the carnal Jew, bitter at contestation, chained to the pride of this world; do we realize fully enough that the true Jew loves Poverty and Tears, is Pure of Heart and Merciful, hungers and Thirsts after Justice and suffers persecution and death for Justice's sake without ever surrendering? The true lineage of Abraham, an indomitable and faithful people, obedient and tenacious, resisting every hardship, who, sword in hand, constructed the Temple and who fell by the thousands to defend it, patient and charitable men, strong and pious women, whose hope watered the miraculous Stem, worthy at last of God Himself, who did not despise a Virgin's womb, or to make Himself their descendants, or to choose them as his fellow-citizens.[3]

Some might call this a romanticizing of Jewish history and every Jew's part in it. Georges Bernanos, who manifested more than a little anti-Semitism during his life spoke derisively of Maritain's "effeminate fantasies" about Jews and Judaism. But is it

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2 *Carnet de Notes*.

3 *Carnet de Notes*, p. 48.

any more so than the way we might speak about the French or Italian or American nations? And if we believe in the Jews as the Chosen People, with all the glories and troubles that entails, it can take on the appearance of a simple statement of fact.

There is no question that Maritain was also just personally fascinated by Raïssa and Vera Oumançoff. As he wrote in an often-quoted passage around the same time of the two of them:

> They had that same quickness of mind, that same delicate sensitivity, an almost airy perceptivity, that same sense of humor in the midst of tears which comes among the children of Israel not from the blood or the flesh, not from racial heredity, but from a kind of refinement or sharpening of nature which from the time of Abraham and Moses grace has brought about in this people and its culture. Such a quality, which is also a particular susceptibility to suffering, can easily become exacerbated in certain cases, but in others is the seal of a kind of royal dignity.[4]

I confess to thinking *this* may be a little bit of Romanticism, not about Raïssa and Vera, whom I think it represents with Jacques' usual insight. But whether a whole people can show a "refinement or sharpening of nature," is perhaps an exaggeration and Maritain himself has to qualify the point in the very next sentence. This tendency to universalize certain elements of Judaism is both a strength and weakness in Maritain's work, as we shall soon see.

This intuitive side of the Oumançoff sisters did, however, I believe it makes Maritain more appreciative than he otherwise might have been of a non-discursive intellectual knowledge. In his great book *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain goes out of his way to affirm the cognitive value of mysticism, particularly in chapter 6 and 8. This is all normal enough even within a Christian orbit. But one cannot help feeling that the great neo-Thomist has been prepared for the intellectual exposition of these things they happen outside the usual syllogistic processes by personal experience. It would take an extensive treatment to prove it, but it would not be entirely wrong to posit the thesis that Jerusalem is here getting greater emphasis in the old debate between Jerusalem and Athens.

In his book on St. Paul, Maritain notes Paul's "refined manner of argument – very different from the Greek syllogism – which follows, among all similes and appropriations of meaning, the intuitive thread of one or another of the multiple meanings of the sacred text, and which often makes use or composite quotations, and long strings of texts."[5]

To be sure, Maritain was a Thomist and believed that in the end rational consistency had to prevail. But there is here a suggestion of something he also noted in *Quelques pages sur Bloy*, that a non-scholastic style of arguing may present us with richer material for rational analysis than will a simple logical effort to solve particular problems. In Bloy's case, Maritain came to think some of the things he once though confused but profound were in fact confused and wrong. But in his friendship with Bloy, which was almost a discipleship, Maritain came to appreciate a certain kind of prophecy, even if that prophet himself, as Bloy often did, unfairly turned people and things into symbols

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[4] *Carnet de Notes*.

[5] JACQUES MARITAIN, trans. Harry Lorin Binsse, New York, 1964, p. 2. The book was originally published in 1941, which is to say in the middle of the Second World War.

and thundered against them as if they were the simple incarnation of some abstract principle.

I myself believe, at any rate, that it is from this early experience that Maritain will later insistently refers to the "mystery" of Israel, even after he freed himself from some of Bloy's extremism. Another early influence, of course, was Péguy. Péguy's well-known characterization in *Notre Jeunesse* of the Dreyfus Affair as a "crisis in three *mystiques*" (i.e., France, Christendom, and Judaism) clearly lies behind this practice as well. Taken in its most basic sense, a mystery by definition is not a problem that can be solved but a condition that must be contemplated. In the case of the Jews, the mystery has very real this-world consequences, as we continue to see in international affairs. For Maritain, the mystery that comes to us through the history of the Jewish people is – after his conversion to Catholicism – an irreducible datum, something like nature itself, a means by which God the Creator and Lord of History has presented us with a substantial matter that conveys both his intentions for us and something that goes beyond mere rational analysis into the hidden ways of God:

> Israel is a mystery. Of the same order as the mystery of the world or the mystery of the Church. Like them, it lies at the heart of the Redemption. A philosophy of history, aware of theology, can attempt to reach some knowledge of this mystery, but the mystery will surpass our knowledge in all directions. Our ideas and our consciousness can be immersed in such things; they cannot circumscribe them.[6]

"How odd of God to choose the Jews," as we say in English. Maritain adds even of the Jewish Diaspora, "despite the economic, political, and cultural forms which this problem superficially assumes, it remains a mystery of a sacred nature, whose major elements St. Paul, in a sublime summary, relates in chapters ix, x, and xi of his Epistle to the Romans."[7]

There is no purely rational explanation available to us for why the Jewish people became the bearers of God's sacred history, any more than a Christian will we have comprehensive reasons why the Second Person of the Trinity became a Jewish child in the fullness of time as God's way to redeem the world.

Theological and Historical Meanings

But we have now passed to the second of the three large issues I want to examine: the theological and historical meaning of Israel in Maritain. There was some evolution in Maritain's thinking in these complex matters. To take just one point – a significant one – while Maritain was under the influence of Fr. Clérissac and had some ties, though fewer affinities, with *Action Française*, he retained his fundamental love and respect for the Jewish people. But at the same time, he was able to argue that there should indeed be a *numerus clausus*, a limited number of Jews in the various sectors of society to prevent their natural status as outsiders and fomenters of absolute justice from upsetting the basic Christian nature of French society. We should understand that this position, however repugnant it appears to us today, had nothing in common with the historic

6 Ransoming 130.

7 JACQUES MARITAIN, "The Mystery of Israel," in *Redeeming the Time*, trans. Harry Lorin Binns, London, 1944, p. 126.

French anti-Semitism that was willing to indulge in all sorts of naked injustices, as in the Dreyfus Affair, to maintain French prerogatives. In fact, in an odd way, Maritain held the view down to his last years that it was impossible for Jews to remain separate or simply to assimilate. The one would leave them isolated from the life of society, the other would essentially destroy their God-given role in history.

In effect, this was a very fine line to walk and Maritain would rethink everything, including the *numerus clausus* both on his own and in reaction to Fascist and Nazi anti-Semitism. Given his profound knowledge of the Christian and Jewish traditions, and his interest in contemporary affairs, Maritain was able to use the special status of Jewish history in a variety of helpful ways. For instance, he uses it to shame the anti-Semites who dishonor Abraham and Moses – to say nothing of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – by their unthinking "racism." In ways pioneered by Péguy and Bergson – whatever differences Maritain may have had with those two figures – Maritain recognizes that intellectual work for the Christian builds on something more than the intellect. As St. Thomas puts it in the *Summa Theologiae*, theology is a "sub-alternate" science, it depends on revelation to give it a starting point it would not reach on its own. Maritain's work is vast and varied because he had a mind that was vast and varied, but it is not a matter of special pleading to recognize that one of the reasons he is such a powerful and influential thinker is his living acknowledgment of his relationship with a 5000-year history both in the Church teachings he came to accept at his baptism and in the concrete fact of his marriage with Raïssa. That relationship continues to shape history.

For many Christians, sacred history shifts from the Jewish people to the Church with the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and establishment of the Church. And in a sense, of course, this is entirely correct. But Maritain notices something else in his reading of the Epistle to the Romans. The dispersion of the Jewish people from the Holy Land because of their rejection of Christ does not simply nullify the Old Covenant. As Paul says, "The gifts of God are without repentance". So even in the reading of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, God's covenant with the Jewish people is not revoked. Their unfaithfulness makes possible the universalization of the faith and its spiritualization, but they are the root stock onto which the wild branches of the gentiles have been grafted. Christians cannot boast over Jews because God has seen to it that all have sinned so that no one may boast over another. And a glorious day of return in fulfillment of the Old Law is coming: "For if the dispossession of them [the Jews] have been the reconciliation of the world, what shall the reintegration of them be, but life from the dead?" "For I would not have you ignorant, brethren of this mystery (lest you should be wise in your own conceits) that blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in. And so all Israel shall be saved. . ."

These passages have a "religious" meaning, of course, but it is clear that they also have in both Paul and Maritain, a dimension that is normally thought of as temporal or secular. They tell us a hidden truth about what might on the surface seem just a story about the Jewish people being dispersed by the usual forces of time and politics. Maritain does not hesitate to say that this deeper element means that what people blithely refer to as the "Jewish problem" has no solution. The Enlightenment rationalist solutions, helpful as they were purely as a means of social peace and basic rights for European Jews, could not really be solutions because something much deeper remains in play, often enough whether Jews themselves wish there to be or not. Some of you may remember the French poet who has the Jews complain to God, "What did we ever do to

you that you have Chosen us?" Catholics and other Christians have no solution to these mysteries, but they do have a responsibility to make the temporal situation "bearable and more supple,"[8] as all await the day of its divine resolution, not through the normal political and social means, but in God's extension of sacred history.

All of this forms the background for Maritain's other reflections on Jews and Hebraism, which ought to be divided into two large sections: first, in his thinking about the ways in which the specific nature of Jewish history has affected the position of Jews in the everyday world and, second, in his thinking about the State of Israel. Both of these subjects are more controversial even than the "spiritual" reading of Jewish history. I myself am a bit uncomfortable with some of Maritain's generalizations about Jews in modern societies, as I hope to show in what follows. And of course, Israel is both a state and a nation whose destiny seems to be forever contested, even among the Israelis themselves. Some years ago, I was a participant at a conference in Jerusalem on the future of religion in the world. A Muslim member of the Knesset spoke about the internal debate going on between secular and religious Jews in his session, and concluded, "I say again we have here the problem that we don't know whether Israel is a country or a religion, to the point that I, as a Palestinian Muslim, am asked to decide as a Knesset member the question, 'Who is a Jew in Israel?'"

We know that, especially in the 1930s, Maritain was at great pains to combat the growing anti-Semitic threat and pronounced it impossible for "to hate the Jewish people and at the same time to remain an intelligent being." (131) In my view, he rightly argues that anti-Semitism itself has a mystical or spiritual meaning, but not every one of the particulars he brings forward as characteristic of the Jewish people seem equally plausible. For instance, he claims that in their rejection of the Messiah, Jewish leaders at the time of Christ "chose the world," and "to that choice their whole people was henceforth bound – until it changes of its own accord." These are difficult theological and moral questions, and they should not of course be read in the obtuse manner of the anti-Semites who blame all Jews everywhere as having sinned against the light. But this group guilt, which Maritain rejects when it comes to responsibility for the Crucifixion, still makes a reader uncomfortable. And Maritain draws other consequences from it. First, that in having chosen the world instead of Christ, Jews are bound to the world. From this, he says, stems their passionate demands for justice, a disquieting element in the world that does not permit anyone to rest content: "It wants, with an eternal will, a supernatural and unreasonable will, justice in time, in nature, and in the community. Greek wisdom has no meaning for Israel: neither its reasonableness nor its felicity in form. The beauty Israel seeks is ineffable, and Israel wants it in this life of flesh today." (135) In addition to the resentments this naturally produces among the worldly, it also serves to awaken Christians who have grown lukewarm, not so much about the Gospel per se, but about the temporal dimension of the Gospel, which has been relatively ignored, Maritain believes, in Christendom.

Though this is suggestive, perhaps the thing that makes us a bit nervous about such proclamations is the absolute divide that lies behind Maritain's vision of Christianity as spiritual and Judaism as temporal bordering on carnal, and his rooting of this division in Paul. Recent studies of Paul and dialogue between Christians and Jews have uncovered a very different idea of the alleged division between Law and Gospel that have been such a strong bone of contention between Catholics and Protestants since the time

[8] p. 131.

of Martin Luther.[9] Some of the Jewish-Christian dialogue has been inspired in part by the very work of Maritain, and he would surely have applauded it, even though it presents some difficulties for the rather sharp distinctions he draws between the people of the Old and New Testaments. This is a subject too complicated to go into here, but it deserves mention because – in a way – it too belongs in the way of reading sacred history that Maritain everywhere urges people to undertake both with regard to the Jews and with regard to their own Christian understanding of human history as something more than the usual interplay of economic, political, social, and cultural forces.

Let me also say, as an American who is not as reflexively wary of the word – and the reality of – capitalism as some people are, that I find it disquieting that Maritain describes Jewish talents for business enterprise as part of their mystical failure and one of the factors that "create the overgrowth of activity in the handling of goods of the earth in money making, which finds in capitalist civilization an appropriate ambience" (139). Any good activity pursued to excess or to the exclusion of other human values can become not only a source of social disturbance but of sin. But Maritain is here, in my view, mixing a correct view of the particular election of Israel with an incorrect view of that people because they are subject to the same errors and temptations that all of us have been affected by. In America, for example, capitalism has mostly been the work of Calvinists, not Jews.

Thus, we see Maritain also claiming that Jewish assimilation is impossible because it means that they will settle down *like other nations*, which in his scheme is impossible. The test case was the assimilation of Jews to German high culture, which they even helped to create. After so many examples including Edith Stein and her family, we may agree that the fate of highly cultured German Jews was singularly tragic. But to make assimilation categorically a spiritual impossibility may in fact exacerbate some of the very problems Maritain is most concerned to avoid. It should be said that in the very process of making these points, Maritain also points to the spirit of poverty and charity most Jews displays, their tenderness and loyalty to the family and the concept of the family, their sympathy for those who are marginalized and downtrodden by the culture. And those qualities, he maintains, have to be highlighted and set against every one of the calumnies that anti-Semites pronounce against the Jewish people.

The conclusion of his analysis sets out a much stronger and more defensible position that may have been lost in the lamentations and recriminations of the past thirty-five years about the Shoah: "The central fact, which has its deeper meaning for the philosophy of history and for human destiny – is that *the passion of Israel today is taking on more and more distinctly the form of the Cross.*" (emphasis in original - 156) And this implied convergence leads inevitably to some large questions about the State of Israel.

The State of Israel

Thanks to his long life, Maritain lived to see the creation of the State of Israel and many of the early problems that it faced – often the very same questions that we still are engaged with today in the Middle East. Despite all controversy, from the very first

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[9] To mention just two useful works, see N. T. WRIGHT's, *What St. Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity*, 1997; and also the essay by RABBI LEON KLENICKI in *Jacques Maritain and the Jews*, 1994.

and until his death, he maintained that Israel not only had a right to exist, but that it had been divinely ordained that the Land of Canaan should belong to the Jewish people. He is so vehement about this point that it allows me to quote a key passage. On the first page of the *Post-scriptum* he added to *Le Mystère d'Israël*, he writes:

> Ce que je voudrais remarquer en premier lieu, c'est que, par un étrange paradoxe, nous voyons aujourd'hui contesté aux Israéliens, par les Etats qui sont leurs voisins, le seul territoire auquel, à considérer le spectacle entier de l'histoire humaine, il soit absolument, *divinement* certain qu"un peuple ait incontestablement droit; car le peuple d'Israël est l'unique peuple au monde auquel une terre, la Terre De Canaan, a été donné par le vrai Dieu, le Dieu unique et transcendant, créateur de l'univers et du genre humain. Et ce que Dieu a donné une fois et donné par toujours.[10]
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> What I would like to say at the outset is that, by a strange paradox, we are seeing today a territory denied to the Israelis, by the States that are their neighbors, the only territory to which, in the entire spectacle of human history, it is absolutely, *divinely* certain that a people has incontestably a right; for the people of Israel is the only people in the world to whom a land, the Land of Canaan, was given by the true God, the unique and transcendent God, creator of the universe and the human race. And that what God has once given is given forever.

And Maritain immediately adds that this should be an article of faith, not only for traditional Jewish believers, but for Christians as well.

As difficult as this may be just for those two groups to accept, Maritain does not stop there. And let me say that fifty years after he wrote his optimism is breathtaking. The old student of Bloy and Péguy maintained that this special and mysterious status of the Promised Land should be clear – though obscurely – to non-believing Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora. Even the Muslim world, he continues, could "decide one day without too much trouble to 'give' to the Jews what, from their point of view, they regard as theirs, but which God, through what has decisively happened, and for the good and peace of the world, asks them to give up."[11]

Maritain was a philosopher, but he was not a fool, and he admits that this will seem utopian to the "realists" who are only preoccupied with the present. The other nations have allowed their interest to poison the whole question – as he saw then and we can say is even more true today – but he still hopes, clearly because of his belief in the profound and chosen nature of the Jewish people that the descendants of Ishmael on the one hand, and of Isaac and Jacob on the other will reach "une entente, évidemment requise si le risque de catastrophes mondiales doit Ítre écarté."

"An understanding, clearly required if the risk of worldwide catastrophes will be avoided."

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10 *Oeuvre complètes,* Vol. XII, 651.

11 652-3. This extraordinary claim deserves to be read in Maritain's very own words as well, "se décider un jour sans trop de peine à 'donner' aux Juifs ce que, de son point de vue à lui, il regarde comme sien, mais dont Dieu, de par l'événement décidément survenu, et pour le bien de la paix du monde, lui demande, de faire abandon."

It is not difficult to detect behind this combination of mysticism and pragmatism, Maritain's belief in the hidden, but deep, unity of the history of the Jewish people and of the Church. Both, unlike merely spiritual religions, are rooted in existence in time, and in the case of the Jews, in a particular land. The founding of the State of Israel, he says, has opened up a "bi-polar" dimension within the Jewish people that should be compared with the somewhat different bi-polarity of Roman Catholics. The Holy Land, and Jerusalem as its capital, of course are a primary point of reference in the Jewish Scriptures and in the life of the people. As we read in Psalm 137: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand wither. May my tongue stick to my palate if I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem beyond all my delights." The Jews in Diaspora – who are legally part of other nations now, though many await the fullness of real acceptance – have regained that point of reference, a dimension of their identity even if they have no intention of returning there, and a point of reference that the other nations of the world have a right to expect will remain a testimony to a certain spiritual destiny. But here, too, Maritain is aware of political complexities. He sees Israel as tasked to find a way to be both religious and temporally secular – perhaps even to be a light to Christian nations who need to do the same. And he rejects the Jewish parties that would turn it into a "Etat sacral," - "Des partis comme le Parti national religieux ou l'Agudat Israël vont à contre-courant de l'histoire."[12] ("Parties like The National Religious Party or Agudath Israel go against the current of history." All this is quite interesting, but if Maritain were alive today we might wish to press him on this seemingly easy acceptance of what he believes is the current of history. Because there are other currents, notably among Palestinian Muslims and Christians, that might be seen as neglected in too exclusive a focus on the question of Israel, important as that question is.

In line with his larger views about the connections between the Jewish people and Catholic Church, he points out that Roman Catholics throughout the world have a similar – though also different relationship with the "Rome of the popes." That Rome was once a secular state too, with its own territories, the Papal States. But the territorial power of the popes was always only secondary and an accessory to their spiritual power and authority over the Catholic world. And the loss of temporal sovereignty during the unification of Italy did not alter the essential role of the papacy. By contrast, says Maritain, territorial power is essential to the State of Israel and its "*mission temporelle*," which is also a spiritual mission, even though Israel has no direct spiritual authority over Jews as the popes do over Catholics. [see top of 657 in translation] And in this sense, Israel introduces, in Maritain's view, a religious crisis into the conscience of Israel, which in its mysterious depths will lead it onwards to face: *Non conversio, sed plenitudo!* Of course, Maritain is here treading close to the delicate question of proselytizing and he makes the daring comparison that the destruction of Palestine by the Romans was analogous with the Crucifixion of Jesus. In this perspective, even the Holocaust can be reappropriated as a "blessed wound" that should lead to a new ardor for the coming of the Savior of Israel.

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12 p. 654, n. 2.

As we can see, Maritain had no ultimate answer for the tensions in his on day in the Middle East, and forty years after his death things are immeasurably more troubling. But I think he is right in warning us about assuming that the conflict is merely economic, social, and political, and in prodding us towards an understanding that profound spiritual forces are at work in history. This is something that Jews, Christians, and Muslims may agree upon, over and above all particular differences. The three religions of the Book regard time as having a special meaning, as the medium in which God unfolds his will for the world. They are not merely "spiritual" faiths looking to another world and unmindful of this one. To acknowledge the "mysterious" religious dimension of the three people just mentioned does not mean that we have to resign ourselves to perpetual strife in the Middle East or one particular way of reading sacred history. Indeed, it might be truer to say that it is in ignoring these deep historical and theological forces that we may be condemning ourselves to a sterile effort because we are not dealing with a reality simply overlooked in international relations.

Particularly in the West, we do not like to have to include religious questions in what we think should be secular matters. America, my own country, is to a certain extent more accustomed to a lively participation by religious bodies in public question than is Europe, I believe, because our democratic tradition springs in part from our churches "the first of their political institutions" as Tocqueville called them in *Democracy in America*. Several countries in Europe – and notably France – have regarded their democratic system as having emerged by throwing off religious influence. I can't go into the question here, but I don't think that is quite the right way to look at it historically. Certainly Maritain's career was in large part devoted to explaining how a Christian democracy was not a contradiction in terms for continental Europe or Latin America, and how a proper view of the human person might allow us to do justice both to the secular and the spiritual sides of human nature.

I'd like to suggest that his example is not most helpful to us as we consider the problems in the Middle East and their consequences for the rest of the world, less for any concrete proposals and more in the conceptual framework that seeks to reconcile temporal and eternal, sacred and secular. There may not be any perfectly rational solution for how the "mystery" of Israel is to be understood in relation to the actual concrete state of Israel. Just as there seems to be no simple way to heal the wounds produced by the deep history of the several people in conflict – Jewish, Muslim, and Christian – in the Middle East. But in the end, Maritain's voice might tell us that there is hope precisely because behind the several parties in the conflict there is a common belief in the work of God in history. Sometimes that work occurs swiftly, as in the French Revolution or the fall of the Soviet Union. Sometimes it is the work of centuries, as in the Land of Canaan.

The *Shoah* introduced a singular event into sacred history that has called for a singular response. The Palestinian peoples are partly right that they should not have to pay for crimes that were committed elsewhere by other peoples. But at the same time, as absurd as it may appear in the face of ongoing military tensions, perhaps the contending parties in the Middle East may actually be privileged participants in yet one more chapter in the history of the religions of the Book. In Europe, in my view, there is too ready a tendency to blame Israel for "human rights violations" and not to see the tragic

dimensions of this conflict that go far beyond what the Israeli Armed Forces or a particular Israeli government may choose as policy. And also in my view, this is leading to a subtle anti-Semitism, disguised as a human-rights movement, which is unfair about the misdeeds of the various actors in the region. The worldly pilgrimage of the various peoples of God has never been easy, and we have our chance perhaps to make it a little less difficult if we can take practical steps, fair to all parties, to lessen violent clashes that, we hope, will also allow still undiscovered modes of coexistence to emerge from the deep root in sacred history in which all of us as sons and daughters of God are called upon to share.