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THE VATICAN AND GERMAN-ITALIAN ANTISEMITISM IN THE NINETEEN-THIRTIES

By Charlotte Klein, London

So much has been written on this topic that one may legitimately ask if any new contribution will help to clarify this still rather obscure problem. The present article is exclusively based on material not investigated so far, taken from the semi-official Vatican periodical, the *Civiltà Cattolica*. It is the opinion of the present writer that the reports, explanations and at times the silence of this authoritative publication may elucidate some aspects of this question which continues to torment Christians more than Jews. It may be a case of "washing dirty linen in public," but it is more honest and in the long run more beneficial to point out the stains than — to change the metaphor — to leave the skeleton in the cupboard.

In April 1933 the *Civiltà* printed the declaration of the German bishops, allowing Catholics to become members of the till then forbidden N.S.D.A.P. Hitler's words before the Reichstag, that the two main religions of the nation are "most important factors of conserving the national traditions" (p. 206) and that their rights will be fully respected, are reported with obvious satisfaction, as is his promise to fight Marxism and his fraternal salute to the sister-state Italy.

The November issue of the same year contains an embarrassed-sounding long defense of the Concordat between Hitler and the Vatican. It sounds like an apologetic answer to the attacks from mainly French Catholics, emphasizing all the good that German Catholics will derive from the treaty : they will be allowed to go to church on Sunday, to follow their moral law, though all priests and religious, the *Civiltà* admits, will have to abstain from any political activity. This is a small matter compared to the advantage that they have the right to teach the true faith to children. The immediate ratification was hailed throughout Germany as the beginning of a new era, in this "historical and providential hour," for Germany, for Europe, for the whole civilised world ("Il Concordato della Santa Sede con la Germania," E. Rosa, S.J., Nov. 1933, p. 346).

This was written *after* the first boycott of Jewish shops ; when Jewish doctors were no longer allowed to treat patients under Social Security ; when Jewish professors had to leave universities and Jewish enterprises

were "aryanised" ; it was written after a great number of Social-Democrats had been herded into the first concentration camps, when even members of the Catholic Centre Party had to flee lest they be imprisoned. The former Catholic chancellor Bruening was one of them. There is something inhuman, almost schizophrenic, in the fact that in all these months, as well as in the following years, the terrible suffering and persecution of tens of thousands of innocent men and women is totally overlooked in the rigid attitude that nothing matters as long as the Church is allowed to continue teaching children the catechism. The authors of the *Civiltà* seem oblivious of the ethical content of this teaching which is diametrically opposed to the Nazi doctrines and practice. The Vatican and its faithful interpreters in the *Civiltà* were beset by two great fears only : loss of members and Communism. With the hindsight of the past four decades one may state that they were right, but paradoxically in a manner they least expected: the tolerance extended to the totalitarian regimes is at least partly responsible for the many empty churches today in Germany and Italy. The fear of Marxism was also justified : profoundly deceived by the acquiescent attitude of the hierarchy in the crucial years of the thirties many former Catholics are looking to Marxism as a guide to social justice, Christianity having failed them in the hour of need.

In Jan. 1934 the *Civiltà* takes issue with Alfred Rosenberg's *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930, 24th ed. 1934), where he is blamed for propounding the legend of Jesus' illegitimate non-Jewish birth. This tale originates "in the Jewish hatred of Jesus Christ" (p. 246) ; the book on the whole is condemned. Condemned too is the doctrine of other Nazi writers who would like to do away with the Old Testament altogether. In the article "The Jewish Question and National-Socialist Antisemitism" (Oct. 1934, E. Rosa) matters are however different : "more serious and containing a basis of truth is the study of Jewish teaching regarding 'the Talmud, the Jewish Kabbalah, Ritual Murder' and other doctrines of modern Judaism*" (p. 135). These have been frequently examined by Catholic authors who, though less violent in their judgments, have pointed out the irreconcilable gulf between Jewish and Christian thought. Again, when the German authors volunteer important and exact information on the extent of international Jewish organisations, for instance on the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, they fulfil a praiseworthy task. They are right to state that owing to its cosmopolitanism and to Zionism there exists indeed a "Jewish peril" (p. 130).

* Ritual murder is implicitly accepted as a «Doctrine» of modern Judaism.

The periodical, treating often the most abstruse intellectual subjects, does not hesitate to devote four pages to the review of a third-rate novel by an Argentinian, G. M. Zuvira (alias Hugo Wast) who published *El Kahal* (Buenos Aires 1935). The review is called "Gold, Money and the Jews" (July 1935). Plot and characters are described as if they really existed: the Jews possess three quarters of the world's gold, Buenos Aires is the third Jewish capital, after New York and Warsaw. The plot turns around a vast speculation in gold, designed to collect it all in the hands of Jewish bankers. There are the usual apostates, the Jewish "femme fatale," and finally the conversion to the Church of the principal characters. The book is called a successful satire, worthy to be compared to Thomas Moore's *Utopia*. For those who know that at about the same time the Nuremberg Party Conference took place, this seems an instance of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning. Six hundred thousand German Jews found themselves the helpless victims of a party machine which was set in motion for their final destruction, the *Civiltà* — consciously or unconsciously — acting as their accomplice.

This process continued throughout the next years. In November 1935, after one short paragraph about the Jews in Germany, their indiscriminate arrests in restaurants and cafés, there is a long article by the apparent specialist E. Rosa, which approves of Goebbels' saying that Jews are responsible for the spread of Communism. Though there are many others involved, "the intellectual leaders are almost without exception Jews" (pp. 268-269). Now at least they have found an opponent in the movement called "Fascist."

In September 1936 the *Civiltà* wants to state its position objectively in a ten page long article "The Jewish Question." As the article is based on the book of a notorious antisemite, Léon de Poncins' *La mystérieuse Internationale juive* (1936), the objectivity is a priori doubtful. Two contradictory facts determine the existence of Jewry: their financial power and their dominant position in the communist movement. Doubtful secondary sources are quoted as evidence. Nor is it difficult to reconcile the contradiction, for both capitalism and socialism are founded on a materialistic world view. Socialism itself is not an end but a means towards the economic dominion of the Jew. His wealth, acquired since the French Revolution, does not consist in landed property or industrial enterprises of social value but in money and shares, easily transferable from country to country. Communism is merely the road to arrive more rapidly at Jewish "pan-capitalism" (p. 40) of the state which they will govern.

J. Bonsivern's *On the Ruins of the Temple* (1928), also quoted, is rather more charitable. True, the Jew has destroyed the Christian

feudal system but it was destined to disappear anyway. As for his participation in the revolutionary movements since 1789, this is at least partly due to the prophetic and messianic inspirations transmitted by the Bible and to his own ever dissatisfied restlessness. He did not create but participated in and fomented all revolutions. His desire for wealth is linked with his religious ideas : the Jew expects his reward in this world, this is one of the main reasons why Jesus' contemporaries rejected him. Their messianism is this-worldly and materialistic, hence their desire for temporal power. The same argument holds good for the Jewish communist : in so far as he is an idealist, he wants to establish justice here on this earth, even at the expense of destruction and death. De Poncins' condemnation of Jewry is brutal and general ; Bonsirven is milder and less violent but the conclusion of both is the same : a great number of Jews constitute a real peril for the whole civilised world.

The *Civiltà* admits that so far no solution to combat this danger effectively has been found. Assimilation has not worked, chiefly because the Jews themselves wanted to remain Jews. Zionism is not the right way either, because Arabs will never surrender their homeland and because most Jews feel no desire to go to Palestine. One solution, if adapted to present-day conditions, might be possible : should there be a Zionist state, then all Jews should be considered its citizens, even if they live elsewhere. Thus they would be foreigners wherever they reside and would come under special laws, as it was the case when they lived in the ghetto, protected by the popes. The other solution, for the distant future, is that of Paul : their mass conversion to the Church.

In the light of the historical events of the following years these pages seem ironical : special laws were promulgated, ghettos were established — but no pope protected their inhabitants. A number of Jews sought refuge in baptism, this too did not help them to escape extermination. The tragedy of European Jewry followed its course. The Vatican later affirmed to have done all in its power to assist the persecuted. Yet the pen is also a powerful weapon, and during these years of gradually mounting oppression the authoritative Vatican spokesmen made no use of it to defend the victims but rather collaborated with those who would finally draw the logical consequences from the arguments so generously provided by the *Civiltà Cattolica*.

There is indeed no lack of arguments. In one of the several articles "On the Capitalist Economy" (Jan. 1937) the "Sons of Israel" are singled out, after the Calvinists, as being responsible for the evils of the capitalist system. W. Sombart's well-known *Die Juden und das Wirt-*

schaftsleben (1911) is cited as an irrefutable source. Jews, thus the *Civiltà*, lend money to the manufacturers of armaments, many governments are their debtors. Amsterdam and London are their centres, stock-exchanges flourish wherever Jews reside. Sombart's opinion that this originates in the Talmud with its teaching on a material reward in this world might be exact or not. It is however beyond doubt, adds the author — A. Brucculeri, S. J. — that the Jews “were and still are the most skilful and unscrupulous exploiters of capitalism” (p. 218). The *Civiltà* apparently ignores how close its attitude towards Jews comes to that of the National-Socialists ; soon it will be pointed out to them by the Fascists that they are the forerunners and allies in Mussolini's antisemitic campaign.

One year before that another article proves the ambiguous attitude of the *Civiltà*. In June 1937 “The Jewish Question and the Catholic Apostolate” stresses several times that the Church is against antisemitism and violence. The manner, however, in which Jews are spoken of is such that these pages differ little from the antisemitic publications of Germany. The Christian apostolate for the conversion of the Jews is particularly urgent, because Jews hold a key-position in modern life : “It is they who exert the greatest influence on the materialistic, immoral and irreligious conception of life” (p. 32). Their own faith is in a state of disintegration, they are the most enthusiastic followers of socialism and communism. The duty to work for their conversion is greater than ever, for the modern Jew makes frighthening progress in antireligious and subsversive activities. At the same time a non-antisemitic attitude, full of charity, is proposed, for only thus will the Jew be gradually persuaded to embrace Christianity. Several such movements of a proselytising nature, which include some social collaboration, are mentioned : they exist in England, in the U.S.A., in Hungary. Catholics must avoid the danger of indifferentism, else they cannot participate in these movements. They must always remain conscious of their duty to spread the Christian truth. The article ends with a long reference to Hilaire Belloc's *The Jews* (1922) ; his suggestion that violent anti-semitism is not the solution is eagerly adopted as being contrary to the principle of Christian charity. Apparently in perfect harmony with this principle is his proposal of “segregation or distinction (formerly called the Ghetto)” (p. 38). It should not be imposed suddenly but develop according to a friendly co-existence. Christians should be guided by prudence and charity ; prudence would teach them how to “remove all danger for Christians and to obviate the two disturbing dominant factors, [the Jews'] materialistic-financial supremacy and their revolutionary drive” (p. 39). Though certain facets of antisemitism

are condemned here, the language and the portrait of the Jew as dangerous capitalist or communist are not essentially different from the language and views of outright antisemites. What is particularly repellent is the motivation : the Christian should “love” the Jew not because of their common humanity but because he is the object of a promised final conversion. Towards this end charity will obtain better results than persecution.

The same solution of the Jewish problem is propounded in “On the Question of Zionism” (March 1938). A completely satisfying answer can only be the one found in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, chapters 9-11: their final conversion. But while waiting for this to happen one must envisage a temporary solution : “the corrupt messianism, the fatal mania of their financial and materialistic domination of the world, these are the deepest causes which make Judaism an explosive force of disorder and permanent danger for mankind. The provisional solution can only be the traditional one, employed by the popes : no open persecution but prudence, coupled with suitable measures, such as some form of segregation or discrimination. Briefly, a certain hospitality and co-existence with the nations, similar to that enjoyed by foreign residents” (p. 77). This proposal is in keeping with the whole *Civiltà* tradition, which, since its foundation in 1850, had deplored the emancipation of the Jews as a great evil and condemned the French Revolution as responsible for it.

This was written at the time of the annexation of Austria by Hitler, when countless Jews were degraded, rounded up for the concentration camps, killed. The futility of the Concordat with Germany had become all too apparent to Pius XI who had launched his encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* in 1937, but the views and the policy of Vatican circles, where Cardinal Pacelli, later Pius XII, played such an influential role, had not undergone any change where Jews were concerned. The thirties constitute therefore one of the saddest and most depressing chapters in the Church history of modern times, because none of the arguments which might attenuate the silence of the pope during the war is valid here. Vatican information was excellent — the *Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, was one of the best informed and most objective of those years — yet the plight of the Jews under Hitler is never mentioned, they are still considered a “peril” and the ever more rapid corrosion of their rights seems to be condoned as a necessary measure of a nation facing a powerful enemy.

In some shorter notes (July 1938) the racial question is mentioned for the first time. The Italians are Aryans, Jews are not. Jews are therefore different and do not form part of the Italian people. This

same new tone appears in the following month : Jews, considering themselves superior, had never wanted to be fully integrated into the Italian nation ; they had been in the forefront of all anti-Fascist movements. They are themselves racially minded and do not want to mix with gentiles. Finally, in Sept. 1938, the anti-Jewish decrees of Mussolini are published and the Fascist press praises the *Civiltà* for having, since the nineteenth century, given so much space to the discussion of the Jewish question and proposed a solution very similar to the one now taken by the Italian government. Three articles in particular are referred to which appeared in the *Civiltà* in 1890 "On the Jewish question in Europe : I. The Causes" (Sept. 1890) ; "II. The Effects" (Nov. 1890) ; "III. The Remedies" (Dec. 1890). These articles and the embarrassed defense of the *Civiltà* must now be examined. This defense is contained in "The Jewish Question and the *Civiltà Cattolica*" (Sept. 1938).

Each of the 1890 articles, in 1938 reprinted in a special edition by the Fascists, had about twenty pages ; it will be possible to give only the bare gist of each. In "The Causes" the arguments are racial, religious and socio-economic. E. Drumont's *La France Juive* (1886) is the most highly recommended account of the "Jewish plague" (pp. 5-6). The Jews have been hated everywhere since pre-Christian times because of their racial pride. The strongest obstacle to their integration among the nations is the Talmudic religion — the Biblical faith having been long since abandoned together with all ethical principles. They are by nature traitors and spies in whatever state they live. Their corrupted messianism teaches them that the earth and the wealth of all gentiles belongs by rights to them. Disraeli in his *Coningsby* (1844) is outspoken on the universal dominion of the Jews. Oaths and promises made to gentiles do not count ; any Jewish tribunal may absolve them from their obligations. Maimonides forbade Jews to restitute anything taken from a non-Jew. For instance in France Jewish criminals are twice as many as French. The nations in return hate the Jews, not "only because of the deicide committed on Calvary" (p. 17), but because of their present crimes they are themselves responsible for the persecutions of which they then complain bitterly. Having invented the so-called "rights of men," they have broken through the barrier of the special legislation which had held them in check and now devour the wealth of Christian nations and undermine their moral values. So much for the "Causes."

"The Effects" could easily be foreseen : the Jews, those "sons of the Devil," have occupied the throne of the world. There follows a more detailed description of their rule of Italy : from 1848 to 1871 their aim

was to destroy, by revolutionary action and commercial fraud, the "rock of Peter." From 1871 on they reigned supreme. The cross has been obscured by Jewish immorality in all walks of life. Instances are quoted from authors like the notorious Jew hater Gougenot des Mousseaux and even a novelist like Guy de Maupassant. The article continues: "Everywhere the Jews have grown fat, prosperous, replete with the blood of the nations and of the Church" (p. 404). Italy should beware of them, for despite their small number they own the state. One of their principal aims is the fight against Christianity. The conception of a secular state originates in world Jewry whose international centre is the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Paris. The Synagogue is ruining Italy, politically, economically, morally. Finally, Jews are responsible for socialism — yet the time will come, so ends the article, when they will have to pay the price for their satanic arrogance.

But the *Civiltà* knows the "Remedies." Until 1789 Jews were everywhere under a special legislation which prevented them from despoiling the Christian nations. The equal rights of emancipation conferred upon them the power to do so. The only means therefore to prevent them from pursuing their innate desire to destroy the values of Christian civilisation is a return to the former laws. The "Jewish plague" (p. 645) has to be eliminated. The best means would be to confiscate their possessions. This is an act of justice, for these possessions are the fruits of their fraudulent transactions. At the same time it would deprive them of their major weapon — gold. It would be doubly justified, for they have not only impoverished Christians materially but morally as well. To be legal, such a confiscation should be decreed by the government and a certain difference might be made between thoroughly corrupt and the few more honest Jews.

Another means, proposed by certain valiant fighters against Judaism, would be expulsion. Again, if decreed by a government, this would be a legal means of defense. But if Jews were chased out of every state, where would they live? For they must survive, according to Paul, for their final conversion. The ideal means is: Jews are to be treated as aliens, and aliens should not possess any property. This again is justified, for the Jews themselves admit that they are cosmopolitans, belonging to no other nation than their own. There has to be a special legislation which deprives Jews of equal rights with their fellow-citizens, without making it impossible for them to exist, yet at the same time protecting the nations from their rapacious exploitation.

Probably the time is not far off when the Jews, finding themselves facing the abysmal hatred of the nations they have ruined, will ask for a special protective legislation and a return to the pre-emancipation

laws. As for the most desirable remedy, their conversion, it is all too obvious that the time has not yet come, Jews persecute the Church everywhere; they are its declared enemies. For the moment, this "most renegade and accursed people" (p. 654) is in a certain manner the chastisement chosen by God for nations like the French, who have become as irreligious as the Jews who rule them. What has happened in France threatens Italy also. Italians should establish anti-Jewish leagues and close their ranks against this terrible peril. If not, the punishment already prepared against Jewish voracity will engulf the Jews together with their gentile collaborators. The article closes with a gloomy prophecy as to the unspeakable punishment destined to come over Jewry.

No wonder that the Fascists in 1938 believed they could do no better than reprint these three articles which contain the whole arsenal of the antisemitism of the nineteen-thirties. The *Civiltà* (Sept. 1938) tried to put up a feeble defense. They point out that these articles were written half a century ago. The periodical had always spoken of and to the Jews with justice and charity, though the latter had not reciprocated these feelings. Despite their persecution of the Church, Christians had no wish to repay them in kind. As the new German and Russian antisemitic ideologies are not religiously motivated, the Church must decline all responsibility for these present out-breaks. The Italian press says that they have much to learn from the *Civiltà's* anti-Judaism and from the Jesuits. The *Civiltà* is not grateful for the compliment, for even towards the least sympathetic of their fellowmen, the Jews, it has never been motivated except by feelings of Christian charity. If they are now accused of having proposed exactly the remedies now applied by the present political regimes, as for instance expropriation, the *Civiltà* in 1890 mostly repeated solutions proposed by others without identifying itself with these proposals. The author, E. Rosa S. J., quotes a few passages where the *Civiltà* had stated that not all Jews were thieves, usurers and cheats. E. Rosa also points out that the "Remedies" had never advocated expulsion. They had proposed special legislation which would allow the Jews to survive without dominating the host nation and which would protect the Jews against persecution. The 1890 articles had argued against full equality, because this would one day turn against the Jews themselves, as they had abused it everywhere. Now the time has come when Jews themselves would wish to return to the former special legislation. The present state of popular feeling against the Jews did not come from the Church but from Protestant Germany and atheist Russia, for whose revolution the Jews bore a heavy responsibility.

The author is forced to admit that the language of his predecessor might have been somewhat too harsh, the style and expressions lacking in Christian mildness ; that was due to the fact that at the time the Church was fighting the corrupting influence of Jewry. It was an era of furious polemics and the *Civiltà* admits that there has been exaggeration, especially of language and expression, all due to the anti-Christian, philosemitic spirit of nineteenth century liberalism. Jews then had played a great part in the dechristianisation of the Western world.

The last article of 1890 foreshadowed the consequences of Jewish influence and unfortunately this prediction has been fulfilled. The present events are not wholly the fault of the Jews but are also due to the inertia and complicity of many Christians. Finally, that the Jewish question has arrived at the point of antisemitic aggression is still the fault of the full emancipation they had been granted, to their own misfortune, while the right of Christians had not been sufficiently protected against their rapacity. The *Civiltà Cattolica* has always seen the problem in its true perspective, then as now.

E. Rosa's pages in no way deny the arguments of 1890, though there is some attempt to attenuate their effect, particularly by trying to draw a line between religious and political antisemitism. In this the article does not succeed. Its matter of fact acceptance of what was then going on in Germany and Italy, its lack of firm protest, are evident. These pages are not even ambiguous ; they still demand a special legislation for Jews. Perhaps there may be found some attenuating circumstances for the silence of the Church and the pope during the war ; but to have remained silent when there was no danger, instead of speaking up for the persecution of a tiny minority (Italy had 30,000 Jews in 1938), cannot be easily forgiven.

One of the first acts of Pius XII (May 1939) was to address a laudatory letter to the editorial committee of the *Civiltà* for "upholding the faith and instructing the people in a salutary manner" (p. 293). The opinions of the *Civiltà*, fiercely anti-Jewish since its foundation in 1850, can therefore be securely ascribed to the Roman curia and its head, the pope. As it is impossible to clearly divide religiously motivated from political antisemitism, one has to agree with Jules Isaac's telling phrase of the "teaching of contempt" by the Church. Religious anti-Judaism had laid for centuries a secure basis for the Jew-hatred of the German and Italian anti-Jewish laws in the nineteen-thirties and finally for the extermination of the six million Jews of Central Europe. Even racial antisemitism had been anticipated by the *Civiltà* by calling Jews a foreign "stirpe" (race).

The only element the *Civiltà* lacked was the power to apply in practice what they preached in theory. But when the regimes who had this power came to govern in countries with a Jewish population they had only apply the methods which the *Civiltà* had so obligingly provided them with for almost a century. The excuse of this authoritative Catholic periodical that they had never taught open persecution is specious — they had done worse : they had portrayed the Jew as the archenemy of all gentile nations. An enemy of such demonic power that he can finally only be defeated by extermination. The Church bears a heavy responsibility for what happened to the Jews in Europe between 1933 and 1945, a responsibility which it has so far refused to assume officially.