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The Bridge

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THE BRIDGE

WHEN God planned the world and foresaw that men would serve idols, an old Jewish legend goes, He paused and wondered if He should not lay His plans aside. But then He saw Abraham, and said: "Lo, here is a rock on whom I can build the world" (*Yalcut* I, 766). To the Catholic too Abraham is a foundation. When, through the mist of idolatry, the voice of the true God reached the patriarch, a fresh beginning was made; with him a new order of things was under way, so that St. Augustine could speak of God's call and Abraham's answer as a hinge of time (*PL* 41:492). He is a turning point in history because, as Scripture never tires of repeating, "he believed"; and his faith, so eminently personal, is forever a pattern of Christian faith. Believing in the living God and His Promise, believing because God has spoken, believing with utter abandonment, he is our father, for we believe like him. Above all, he is father to her who was full of grace and faith, for his response to the God who summoned him made possible Mary's perfect response.

Thus the history that starts with him is not merely national but in the deepest sense universal; it is indeed the story of the Jews, but it is, at the same time, the story of the world's salvation. All that happened from Abraham till John the Baptist happened not to an alien people but to men and women who are our ancestors in the spirit. Hence their lives are part of our lives, a truth ever present to the mind of the Church and entering into her liturgy, particularly her blessings. When, on the feast of Mary's nativity, the Church blesses seeds and seedlings, she sees herself one with the children of Israel who, having settled in the land of promise, offered the first-fruits as Moses had commanded them. Again, in her blessing of an organ, its music is said to continue the praise the Israelites sang to God with trumpets and cymbals, while the bells in her towers are blessed as echoes of the joyous harp of

David and the thunder that dispersed the foes of the chosen people.

To show this unity of sacred past and present is one of the tasks the editors of THE BRIDGE have set themselves. It is, I think, a needed work, getting to the heart of things. And there is strength in seeing again that a wondrous unity bridges the centuries, that the world is no parcel of broken or unrelated pieces, rather a universe lovingly ordered. But immediately one asks: What is the place of the Jews of today in this realm of love? A Christian cannot forget that they are linked, not merely by blood but by heavenly design, to the men and women who stood at Sinai, to whom first God made known in words and on tablets of stone the universal law: those great commandments that are not like the statutes of the earth, for they begin with "I am the Lord your God" and end with "your neighbor." A Christian gladly remembers that the Jews today and ever are the people to which in olden days God sent the peerless prophets; the people which, in the words of St. Augustine, was itself once "a prophet of Christ, and from which the flesh of Christ was born" (PL 40:435-436). "Through Christ and in Christ," the great Pius XI said, "we are of the spiritual lineage of Abraham. . . . Spiritually, we are Semites." Jews, then, are in a way the Christian's kin, and Jesus is the Bond which binds us to them.

"Spiritually we are Semites." It is to a search into the many implications of these words of Pope Pius XI that this and the succeeding volumes of THE BRIDGE will be devoted. They will explore the basic unity of Old and New Testaments, confront the rabbinical tradition with the teaching of the Church, examine the relationship between Christians and Jews on the temporal plane, review Jewish thought and life down the ages, weigh recent attempts by Jewish thinkers and artists to interpret the Christian revelation, sift modern views of Jewish existence by Jews, Christians, and writers who are neither, and discuss many other apposite topics; thus the work of THE BRIDGE will extend from theology, philosophy, and history, to literature, art, and sociology. To this end, Father Oesterreicher has succeeded in bringing together distinguished American and European scholars—a true *universitas scholarium*, in which, though each one bears responsibility only for his own contribution, all are united in the same spirit. In these many ways THE BRIDGE bears out its name.

This Yearbook of Judaeo-Christian Studies has, I feel, a prophetic message. It cannot fail to have some influence on contemporary

thought, which, rich and various though it is, stands in need of a unifying principle. For some it may even lead to an encounter, like Abraham's, with the God who has not been silent. In any case, it is my hope and the hope of all who have shared in its planning that this Yearbook will be for many a bridge to that wisdom which, in the words of the Old Testament, is the image of His goodness, that wisdom which no evil can overcome, which of all things active is the most active (*Wis* 7:26, 30, 24). Seton Hall is happy to sponsor this venture of learning and love.

MONSIGNOR JOHN L. McNULTY
President, Seton Hall University