Religious Instruction

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RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

THE Declaration on the Jews offers valuable insights, in general, into the bond between Jews and Christians and, in particular, into the orientation necessary for proper catechetical instruction. Of the latter, the Declaration says: “May all, then, see to it that nothing is taught, either in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God, that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.” As has been observed, the formulation of previous drafts was somewhat different and more explicit. The schema of 1963, for instance, admonished catechists and preachers to say nothing that would arouse hatred and contempt toward the Jews. However formulated, such words would seem superfluous had Christians always kept in mind their ties to the Jewish people.

Obviously, the Council issued its directive for implementation by the Christian community. In this short essay, I would like to examine what can be done about the correct instruction of children and adults. Since Judaism is intrinsically related to our religious heritage, it should be in the foreground, in primo piano, of our catechetical work. One could discuss this topic at great length, but I will confine myself to the way it is handled in a Roman religious school.

OUT OF ISRAEL

In this school, we approach the problem in a twofold manner, directly and indirectly: directly, by attacking deep-seated prejudices head on (the culpability of the Jews for the Crucifixion, Pharisaism, among others); indirectly, by seeking to create admiration for the people chosen by God and a spirit of brotherly love toward them to whom we are bound by a common legacy and a kindred spirituality.
Our civilization is built on basic concepts that have come down to us from Israel. Some of these have become second nature to us so that we give their origin little thought. Foremost among them is the belief in, and worship of, one God. Some learning is necessary in order to understand that there was an age when men worshipped many gods; it also takes some effort to visualize the overpopulated pantheon of antiquity as a religious reality. Yet, things were not always to remain thus. Even while the most advanced civilizations were polytheistic, there arose in the midst of all the peoples of the world, a Hebrew, a nomad, whose religious life was a constant dialogue (Gen 12:1–3). Two voices dominated this dialogue, the Lord’s and his own, that of the one God speaking to man, and that of man adoring the one true God. Later, Israel’s belief in the one God was preached more fully. But Abraham was the first, and for a time the only one, in whom the knowledge of God was clear and bright.

No event in the history of the human mind, no discovery or intellectual conquest equals, or can be compared to, the encounter with God. Prior to the revelation of the one and triune God through Christ, Abraham’s budding belief in the one God was the greatest event. If truth is compared to light, we can say that in Abraham the light of God, of the true living God, was kindled—that it was kindled in Israel and from there it illumined the whole world. Without doubt, the story of Abraham is a summit in the history of man.

The one true God is a merciful God. The Greece of the fifth century B.C., its splendor notwithstanding, preserved a mechanical and magical concept of sin. At that time, the prophets of Israel had already preached the turning to God through repentance, teshuvah. Thus Israel was wont to pray: “Make us turn to you, O Lord, and we will turn” (Lam 5:21). As Israel saw it, all sin is rooted in man’s heart, and from it alone, the sin that begins with Adam continues to spring forth. Sin is thus an inner motion of the heart. For Israel, an objectively sinful act performed without concurrence of the will is not a sin. Oedipus, however, was hopelessly crushed by the weight of a crime that he had committed unknowingly.

Out of Israel came the word that engendered hope among the nations. It is a fact that the world of antiquity could not meet life except with nostalgia: that better world, the golden age, had gone forever. Israel’s spirit, on the contrary, is essentially messianic; it sees the passage of time, not as an end, but as a progress of hope towards the realization of the Messianic age. Belief in the one God is a willed; confident and deep-seated conviction of the concepts of our civilization; nor is it a system toward the Book that is the basis of the Church, the school will treasure the heritage of the men of faith in Abraham.
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old, but as a progressive enrichment. Israel, therefore, tends to be full
of hope towards the future since the best is still to come.

Belief in the one God; awareness that this must be deliberately
illed; confident anticipation of the future—all these are basic con-
cepts of our civilization. When we ponder this, sentiments of love
toward the Book that has preserved these treasures rise in us sponta-
neously and, no less, gratitude toward that people which has kept them
and transmitted them to the world. We trust that the children of our
school will treasure these sentiments.

UNITY OF THE TESTAMENTS

The main source of our love for the Jews is, I believe, the Old
Testament, even though its intepretation is a "sign of contradiction"
between Jews and Christians. Even from a cultural point of view, the
Old Testament is something great, something that is ours. It
deps our knowledge and leads to an awareness of a most important Semitic
element of our civilization toward which we cannot remain indifferent.

We must see the Old Testament, however, not only as an essential
part of our thinking but as something timely and something that ought
to be present in our religious life. I would like to point out something
fundamental in the catechisis of the Fathers of the Church that, I
think, should resume its place in the religious instruction of our day:
typology, that intepretation of Scripture which considers the Old and
New Testaments in the unity of the divine plan, a plan realized in
ever progressive steps. In such a perspective, it is impossible to separate
the reality of our present religious life from the history that preceded,
prepared, and foretold it.

Our baptism—our delivery from Satan's dominion and our entry
into the people of God—is not an event that stands alone. Its saving
waters take on their full significance only when they are seen in the
light of the other saving waters by which God gave striking evidence
of His power: the waters of the Red Sea. Passing through them,
Israel became the people of God. Similarly, in the Eucharist, we find
brought to perfection what was prepared as long ago as the days of
Abraham. In a way, we find there the priesthood of Melchizedek, the
offerer of bread and wine; we find, too, the offering of life, imperfect in Isaac, perfect in Christ. Christ the Victim is still the paschal Lamb that saves from death. He is the "bread from heaven," food in the desert. Such parallels derive their meaning from the unifying purpose that binds all the works of God together and unfolds itself across the ages in that providential care with which He intervenes on behalf of His people.

The deepest reality of our spiritual life, then, is illumined from different angles; its meaning is revealed by a mosaic wrought by the wisdom of God whose hands have pieced it together with the passing of time. Since events of the sacred past are here interpreted theologically by a method strictly tied to the facts, they are within the reach of children. The child thus becomes gradually accustomed to living his religious life in continuity with that of ancient Israel; he becomes conscious of the eternal timeliness of the Old Testament and of a spirituality common to both the Jewish people and the Church.

A danger that always threatens the study of the Old Testament is thus eliminated—that is, the danger of considering it worthy only of archaeological attention and without relevance to the life of the faithful today. Yet, one must also guard against the opposite error, namely, considering the Old Testament events in their theological significance alone, while divesting them of the concreteness of human history. Two things are necessary: first, to learn to know the facts in themselves, in their cultural context and their historical impact; second, to study their "mystery," that is, to see in them the progressive revelation of God's plan.

In catechetics today, there are opposite schools of thought: one theocentric, the other anthropocentric. They tend to meet in Christ, their new bond. Today more than ever, we feel the need to know the human fate of that people which God chose for Himself so that, in it, the Son would become man. It has been said: "To know God one must know Israel" (Renckens), and "Israel's experience is an indispensable reference for the true knowledge of God, as far as is given us, provided one moves close to the Christian vision of Him." Israel must therefore be known by itself—and true knowledge is love—thereby avoiding the danger of a lifeless shadow that is, a people that did not exist.

It follows that Israel is a people that did exist in a Christian era. There is no longer of the time of Christ; the latter is a prevailing—today we acknowledge, not only that tie us to them.

**BIRTH OF THE LITURGY**

It is appropriate and necessary for adults conscious of their past and took form in the Christian era. The Eucharist bears the features of the Jewish liturgy; it is liturgical. 

A widespread opinion is that Jesus celebrated the Jewish Passover today is substantially the meal is accompanied with its apex, the Paschal offering event in Israel's life opportunity to participate.

The more ancient rite, the celebration of the Mass, thus celebrate the great beginning with creation as the exodus from Egypt to the Eucharist. Since the Word is maintained in son within itself and con tradition, Latin rite. Yet many primitive form, so r.

While imperfect, the paschal Lamb in heaven," food in the life of the Church and of a people that did not disappear from history with the rise of the Christian era. There are the Jews of Old Testament times, the Jews of the time of Christ, and the Jews among us, today. To forget the latter is a prevailing tendency. Yet, it is of extreme importance that we acknowledge, not only their existence, but also the spiritual bonds that tie us to them.

**BIRTH OF THE LITURGY**

It is appropriate and timely, I believe, to make both children and adults conscious of the fact that our liturgical life had its beginnings and took form in the Jewish world at the time of Christ and even today bears the features of that world. Our greatest liturgical act, the Eucharist, consists of two parts, both of which were born in a Jewish atmosphere; they still reveal their kinship with the Jewish liturgy.

A widespread opinion among scholars holds that at the Last Supper Jesus celebrated the Jewish Passover. The ritual of the latter observed today is substantially the same as it was in the time of Christ: The meal is accompanied by the recitation, *haggadah*, of Israel's history with its apex, the exodus from Egypt. The meal re-enacts this essential event in Israel's life, so as to give every Jew throughout the ages an opportunity to participate in that basic experience.

The more ancient formulas of prayer that accompany the Consecration of the Mass, the Anaphora, show an analogous structure. We thus celebrate the great interventions of God on behalf of His people, beginning with creation, remembering the call of the patriarchs and the exodus from Egypt, and concluding with the establishment of the Eucharist. Since the risen Christ is present there, the Eucharist unites within itself and completes the history of the past. A similar structure is maintained in some oriental liturgies; it has been lost, alas, in the Latin rite. Yet many look forward to a restoration of the Canon in its primitive form, so much closer to that which Jews celebrate at the
It is evident that this fact is not only of scientific interest but is also a spiritual link of the greatest importance.

Turning to the first part of the Mass—the Liturgy of the Word—we know that it goes back to the worship of the Synagogue, which at the time of Christ as well as today is centered in the word of God as embodied in the Torah and the prophets. It was in a synagogue that Jesus frequently preached. Physically and morally, it was the most appropriate environment for hearing His message; that is to say, it was the place where the people could best be met and were likely to be most receptive. When the reading of the word of God, which promises the Messiah, is concluded, the synagogal liturgy responds with a plea of the reader on behalf of the worshipping community that God come “during your life and during your days” (Kaddish).

Hearts are thus stirred to expectation and hope, an expectation and a hope to which Jesus responded with His presence in the Synagogue. On one occasion, at Nazareth, He gave an explicit answer to this expectation: Unequivocally, He proclaimed Himself the Messiah (Lk 4:16-22). On that day, the synagogal liturgy became the Christian service of the word. To the Scriptures was added the proclamation that God had come: The Messiah had come.

To this very day, the Liturgy of the Word bears the mark of its birth in the Synagogue long ago. Quite often, Jews and Christians meditate on the same scriptural themes on the same occasion. Instances of this correspondence are too numerous to list here; they are particularly frequent during the season of Lent. Let me just point out that, on the third Sabbath of the preparation for the Passover, the Synagogue devotes all her readings to the idea of purification by water. Thus she reads Numbers 19, which deals with the preparation of lustral waters, and Ezekiel 36, which speaks of the eschatological water that will regenerate Israel, cleanse it from all impurities, and give it a new heart and a new spirit. During the third week of Lent, the Church reads the story of the recovery of Naaman the Syrian, who was made whole by the waters of the Jordan (4 Kg 5); the dispute between Jesus and some Pharisees over the washing of hands (Mt 15); the account of Moses’ striking water from the rock (Num 20); and

Since these lines were written, three new versions of the Anaphora have been introduced into the liturgy as well as a new order of readings [Editor].
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Jesus' promise of the water of everlasting life to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4). In other words, we have the same themes in the Synagogue and in the Church but illustrated by different texts.

There are instances, moreover, when the Church is more conservative than the Synagogue. With the latter, Pentecost has shed its ancient character of harvest feast to become the celebration of the giving of the Law. On that day, the book of Ruth is still read, obviously because a connection is seen between the feast and the agricultural background of David's grandmother. A late midrash, however, seeks to obscure this aspect and tells of Ruth's sufferings in order to teach that suffering was necessary for Israel to receive the gift of the Law. On Pentecost, the Church still reads Leviticus 23:9-22: "When you come into the land which I am giving you, and reap the harvest, you shall bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the priest" (v. 10); and Leviticus 26:3-12: "If you walk according to my precepts, if you keep my commandments, and put them into practice, I will give you rain in due season, so that the land will bear its crops and the trees will bear their fruit" (v. 3); finally, Deuteronomy 26:1-11: "When you have come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil . . ., and putting them into a basket, go to the place which the Lord your God chooses for the dwelling place of His name . . ." (vs. 1–3). These readings do not in any way reflect the character of the Christian feast of Pentecost; they are evidently inherited from the Jewish liturgy.

While the latter presentation can be developed only among adults, the former, which examines the origin of the two parts of the Mass, has been treated profitably with seven- and eight-year-old children.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE JEWS

Even in the instruction of small children, our relationship with the people of Israel must play a role by frequent allusion. Children even of the age of four can be told—and it has been done—that God made known His hidden plan of things-to-be in a special way to the prophets. They spoke to the people of the Messiah who was-to-come,
and they were Jews. Similarly, it can be stressed that near the crib of Jesus there was Mary, a Jewish maiden, and Joseph with the shepherds, all of them Jews; that Palestine, the land of the Jews, is also the land of Jesus; that the crowds which heard from Jesus' lips the parables, on which we continue to meditate, were made up of Jews. Thus even small children will learn, little by little, not to separate Jesus from His people and to love the Jews as the people of Jesus. Once they reach seven or eight years, the more complex elements, which I have already emphasized, can be added, and the road to a full appreciation of God's dealings with His people will be ready.

With children thus prepared, the combat against prejudice is no longer necessary. This, I am sorry to say, does not apply to adults. Among them, the region of sharpest pain is Pharisaism. Often, the Pharisee of the parable—a universal human type—is mistakenly considered the typical Jew. In my opinion, the spirituality of the Pharisees ought to be taught in its entire scope so as to make clear that the Pharisee of the parable represents the degeneration of Pharisaism, indeed, its suicide.

Pharisaic spirituality is an integrating spirituality; that is to say, it demands a living participation of all Israel in the worship, for the whole people is a priestly people. The Pharisees opposed the Sadducees, who were tied to the official priesthood of the time which tended to make the worship of God the privilege of one single class.

In contrast to this, the Pharisees exalted the cult of the Torah, open to all, superior to the sacrificial worship which was the fief of the priests. The liturgical innovations made by the Pharisees were aimed precisely at developing a wider “lay” participation in the service of God. In this respect, the institution of “stands” or “posts,” maamadot, was particularly significant. These were groups of nonpriestly Jews who attended the daily sacrifice as representatives of all Israel. The spirituality of the Pharisees was realized through the institution of the Synagogue where everyone could worship; in a way, it was antagonistic to the Temple, the stronghold of the priests.

The integral spirituality of the Pharisees involved both the community and the individual. The multiplication of the mitzvot had this purpose: that nothing in the life of the individual be kept from the service of God. It is well known that the number of precepts total 613, a figure derived from which the number of was added. The number is that, in the life of the year and not a single service of the Lord.

The value of a spirit of excellence holds a significance of itself all day long the Lord accomplishes religious stance, deep faith in the creditor. Consequently, the parable who carries out its spirit. His personality but they are devoid of it remains unrealized it destroys the very unity it collide with the tendency to say “Lord, Lord,” it.

A cool-headed reading between Jesus and the but also that their relation he did toward Him (Lk 13:25). For their part, the Pharisees, as garment (Mk 6:56; the Temple, the place concept through which to or accepted the doctrine,(Mt 23:2-3). Believers of Jesus and His follow generally speaking, even to persons who bring to their reading
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and the Temple, the place consecrated to the Lord, to be used as a short cut through which to carry merchandise (Mk 11:16). Actually, Jesus accepted the doctrine of the Pharisees when it was animated by the right spirit: "The Scribes and the Pharisees have sat on the chair of Moses. All things, therefore, that they command you, observe and do" (Mt 23:2-3). Belief in the resurrection, too, drew the Pharisees to Jesus and His followers (Ac 23:6–8).

Generally speaking, these simple observations may be a revelation, even to persons who have some familiarity with the Gospels but who bring to their reading of it the burden of age-old prejudices.
THE CROSS

The most difficult problem is the Crucifixion, toward which, strangely enough, both catechetics and Christian preaching maintain an ambivalent attitude: It is taught, on the one hand, that Jesus died for all and that He saved them; it is affirmed, on the other, that "the Jews" killed Him. The contradiction between these two statements is so obvious that it seems odd they are made so calmly. If the first statement is true, and it is, then the second one cannot be true. Everyone hopes to enjoy the fruits of the sacrifice of Christ, but we cannot enjoy them unless we acknowledge that we ourselves are responsible for His death because of our sins. The Jews are responsible for the death of Christ in that they, too, are sinners; the gentiles are no less responsible for they are sinners as well.

It has been noted that there is significance in the presence of Jews and pagans around the cross of the Lord. Jews were there, among them the apostle John and the mother of Jesus. Pagans were there, among them the executors of the death sentence as well as the centurion who beat his breast and said: "Truly, this was the Son of God" (Mk 15:39). Even in the dark hour of the trial, the responsibility was divided between Jews and pagans. The Sanhedrin—called it seems, into an illegal session—proclaimed Jesus guilty of death. But without Pilate, the sentence could not have been carried out, since the Jews did not have the *jus gladii* (Jn 18:31). The proclamation of the Sanhedrin could have sprung from religious fervor; Pilate's sentence was that of an unfair judge who knew he was condemning an innocent man.

From that Cross, which somehow both Jews and pagans raised, came a prayer: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). Was the supreme forgiveness of Christ invoked only on the pagans? Could a plea of Christ remain unheard? The Fathers of the Church have seen in the two arms of the Cross an embrace of the two "peoples" of the world: the Jews and the pagans whom the Sacrifice of Christ has brought together. Ever since, men have tried to keep them divided, digging an abyss of hatred between them and camouflaging the Jews mark a the very sight of i
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them and camouflaging it with religious zeal. May the Declaration on
the Jews mark a beginning of the fulfillment of that unity to which
the very sight of the cross of Christ should call us.

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