Book Review: 'A Theology of Election' by Jakob Jocz

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DUS prayer has provoked, murder: In real content, the Church shows cease to be Jews. Here things done by others — and their enchantment at level lançht a concerted form of the Jewish emotions at this defined that, without delay, "Pour our day wrath for the massacre of six explicit consent of the of Judaism against the this admirable prayer of the nation" can be with complications ex- conservative and detrimental to classic of all, not do those who seek only to this periodical can be with complicated ex- visistic and detrimental to classic of all, not do this periodical can be with complicated ex- visistic and detrimental to classic of all, not do those who seek only to
A JEW who accepts Jesus as the Messiah represents in his own person the healing of the schism that "divides historic Israel from the Church."

He belongs to both and in him both are united. He is not so much the bridge from the one to the other, as the focus of the eschatological promise: All Israel shall be saved. The presence of the Hebrew Christian in a predominantly Gentile Church serves as a reminder that God is still the God of Israel, of the Covenant, and of the Promises. In him the Church finds the visible demonstration of the faithfulness of God (p. 184).

The writer of these lines, a Polish-born Jew, ordained to the ministry of the Church of England, is now Professor of Systematic Theology at Wycliffe College, Toronto, and President of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance. Into a brief book of 193 pages, he has compressed many insights and deeply held convictions. He himself says that his book "is the result of years of searching, and [that it] was written under inward compulsion" (copyright page). One can readily believe it.

The author’s major concern is to explore the ways of God with men and theirs with Him. Though not oblivious of Jewish suffering or of the unsettled state of Jews in many lands, he is concerned with both only in so far as they tell him something about the ancient covenantal bond with God or its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. Others may take issue with the book as a whole or with parts of it; for this reader it is a work of peace. At times, its author appears convinced that he alone has the true insight into the mystery of Israel. Still, some of his arresting statements may be nothing more than a part of his rhetorical equipment.

According to Dr. Jocz, the whole of Israel’s history has "revelational" significance. Ancient Hebrew history, although profane in every other respect, is "sacred with a view to its purpose." This purpose


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is simply Israel's "relatedness to the Messiah." Before His coming, her history is "fore-history, an introduction to, or the background for, the Incarnation of the Son of God" (p. 2). But even after His coming, Jewish history is not left undisturbed: "It is the history of the People of God in suspense—it points towards the End." Its contemporary significance is to show that the word of God is contemporaneous, "that the God of Israel is and remains the God of the Covenant." With Karl Barth, therefore, Dr. Jocz sees in the Jewish people "the one natural proof of God's existence" (p. 3). As long as the Jews endure, it can be demonstrated and even seen that He is the God of fidelity. But the same God who once spoke to the fathers through the prophets, speaks now to the Jewish people through His Son.

If a man, Jew or Gentile, hears the word of the Cross and answers it, then forgiving grace and mercy and righteousness are his. If his response is negative, or if the word has never been addressed to him as to a distinct person, then he may be a member of the Synagogue or of the Church but he is not part of the Israel of God (see pp. 136-138).

Obviously, this distinction between the Church and the Israel of God, which plays a considerable role in Dr. Jocz's theology, is not a Catholic one. For him there is sanctification neither through descent from Abraham nor through membership in the Church. Both are accidents of birth or of politics, as in the case of mass conversions under warrior kings like Clovis; neither has any scriptural warrant for providing membership in the Israel of God. One enters that holy community only by individual vocation and response; even as early as Abraham's day, man's answer to God's call was a matter altogether personal. Dr. Jocz thus has no patience with "Semitic totality thinking," as it applies to membership in Israel according to the flesh or to corporate sanctification in Christ.

Excellent though his emphasis on the need for individual surrender is, he seems not to understand the interplay between person and community in the realm of grace. One becomes a Christian, not merely by faith, not merely by personal submission, but also by the sacrament of rebirth which makes one a living stone in the temple of God, a member of Christ's Mystical Body, a fellow in the Communion of Saints. The Church and a person's faith in Christ are not related to each other as are a man and his clothing; the intimate link between the
individual believer and the family of the faithful is like that of cell and tissue. The many and varied cells of a human body are what they are and have life, because they belong to an organism. The Church is the organism of grace.

When Dr. Jocz speaks of the Church, he is likely to think of what he calls the "Gentile Church," a church in constant danger of forgetting her connection with Israel and of assuming that she has "succeeded where Israel has failed" (pp. 3-4). He seems very much aware of Christendom's record of twenty centuries of failure to love or to comprehend apostolic teaching. The concept of the Church as a divine institution, as Christ in the world, however, leaves him uneasy, for it gives the appearance of an institutional triumph. Consequently, when describing all those transformed by the message of the Cross, he much prefers to call them "the People of God" or "the Israel of God." He is not especially distressed by the fact that those born anew should belong to a visible Church, in fact he rather expects it. As long as they are aware that the Church is prone to all the false values of the Synagogue, they are, he feels, amply warned. It is in this spirit that he writes:

Church and Synagogue overlap constantly, there is no rigid division between them. Outwardly, Church and Synagogue as institutions are completely separate; inwardly, Church and Synagogue as a relationship to God have no set frontier .... The Christian becomes a Jew wherever he lives by works and not by grace; the Jew becomes a Christian whenever he despairs of his own righteousness and throws himself upon the mercy of the righteous God. The Christ who is hidden to the Synagogue becomes visible to the Jewish man as he seeks for a token of God's forgiving grace (p. 6).

For one thing, this passage makes clear that Dr. Jocz has nothing in common with those who hold that, while the Law is God's word to the sons of Abraham according to the flesh, the Gospel is His word to the Gentiles, and to the Gentiles only (see p. 184). As he rejects the "two-way" theory that would make Jesus the Messiah of the nations alone, so too is he out of sympathy with the view that the "Hebrew Christian" has a favored position because the Jews were called first (see pp. 179-188). Although many of his expressions seem at first sight to say the opposite, Dr. Jocz holds no more on this point than
does St. Paul. With both St. Peter and St. Paul, he repeats that God is no respecter of persons, no God of bias (see Ac 10:34 and Rom 2:11). The "Hebrew Christian" has no singularity among the people of God other than the unavoidable one of greater proximity to the story of revelation: "In respect of history, there is a difference between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ, though theologically there is none" (p. 180).

Unless I misunderstand the author, the witness the Jewish convert gives to God's saving work in Christ is a special one, just as is the witness of the Gentile, that quondam worshipper of idols or of the God of reason. Still, at times one gets the impression that the role he actually assigns to the Jewish convert is that of the conscience of the Church, ever calling her back to her pristine obedience, ever reminding her that "the Lord God is no man's debtor" and that she lives only by grace (see pp. 187-188). This notion of a unique calling within the Church seems to be based on the supposition that the Jewish convert has a familiarity with the gratuitous character of the order of grace that others cannot experience. This is open to serious doubt.

If Dr. Jocz's terminology often sounds aggressively evangelistic, I do not think it is essentially so. Although in his choice of phrase and argument he appears Lutheran and Barthian by turns, he would probably maintain that his soteriology is Pauline and Augustinian, which for this writer is to say, Christian and Catholic. None but the smallest reservation need be made against his theology of grace and faith, or against that of Jesus' atonement which makes both possible. Whoever grants that the authors of the Letter to the Hebrews and of the Apocalypse were Jews, like St. Paul, who knew the meaning of the Temple and its sacrifices, and the mediatory role of a priesthood within a nation that was priestly, will also grant that the author's description of the way in which the Jewish man enters into the Israel of God by faith in the sacrificial and saving death of Jesus of Nazareth, does not transgress biblical categories.

According to Dr. Jocz, "propitiation by sacrifice, mediation by the priesthood, imputed holiness by the shedding of sacrificial blood" are basic concepts of the Old Covenant (p. 38). Rabbinical Judaism abandoned them. The study of the Law, especially those parts referring to the sacrifices, served as a substitute for the sacrifices themselves, and the vacuum created by the loss of the Temple after the destruction
repeats that God in 70 A.D. was never truly filled. Instead, a virtual apotheosis of the Law took its place (see p. 94). While originally Israel's way and worship were historical, propitiatory, and mediatory, Judaism became legalistic when at its lowest and mystical when at its highest. "By accepting the principle of direct approach to God, [Judaism] has by-passed the basic principles upon which Old Testament faith was founded. This is the point of departure between Church and Synagogue" (p. 38; see also p. 87). The Church, on the contrary, holds fast to the great visions of the Old Testament. The principles of mediation, rites commemorative of historical redemption, and most important of all, the election of Israel as a totally unmerited grace—now become universal according to the prophetic promise—all these are Israel's legacy to her.

Whenever the Synagogue considered the election of Israel, the mark of which is the Torah, to be self-merited, or whenever it viewed the Torah as an immutable and permanent code, conformity with which brought sanctification of itself, then the Old Testament was betrayed. For it was a religion of promise, of unmerited choice, of encounter with a Person through the medium of the word and of sacrifice. From this order of grace and encounter, the New Testament never deviates; hence it embodies a better comprehension of the religion of Israel than that which has survived in the Synagogue.

According to the rabbis, commitment to the Law makes the difference between Israel and the nations. To comply with God's will, a Gentile needs only to keep the basic laws of morality, whereas a son of the Covenant has special obligations. "A proselyte chooses to keep the Torah, a Jew has no choice" (p. 65). It is, then, a revolutionary way of closing the gap between the two when St. Paul declares that "in Christ Jesus there is no difference between Greek and Jew" (p. 66). Yet, though the reconciliation by the Cross is above the Law, it does not negate the Law; if it did, God would be unfaithful to His promise, and this is inconceivable. What has actually happened to the Law, the holy and righteous command that reveals sin but neither overcomes nor bars it? It has been brought to its telos, its end or completion, which is Christ (see Rom 10:4). Though negative in its function, it has come to a positive conclusion. "It 'ends' in [Jesus the Messiah] because it is fulfilled in him, because its original purpose is accomplished in him" (p. 71).
Dr. Jocz finds much of the traditional Christian apologetic on the place of the Law in New Testament times both inadequate and based upon wrong premises. St. Paul and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews had a correct view of it, a view already lost by the Epistle of Barnabas, by Justin the Martyr, and by some other patristic writings. Instead of seeing the Law “fulfilled” (Jesus’ own words in Mt 5:17), they saw it abrogated. According to St. Cyprian, the Law of Moses ceased with the reign of Christ, and the New Law was given. Origen eliminated the terms of the Mosaic Law by interpreting them allegorically. The net effect of this failure to see an irrevocable divine commitment “fulfilled” is to see the gospel merely as another law, complementary to the first. But the gospel is not a new law, not the “Law of Christ”; it is rather the good news of God’s universal love, “the Gospel of Grace” (p. 74). In it, the promise given to Abraham of a blessing that will cover all the nations of the earth (see Gen 22:18) is come true.

“Man cannot save himself, but he can submit by ceasing to resist salvation. Metanoia is a moral miracle, not a magical or mechanical experience. God gives his Holy Spirit, but only to those who ask for him (Lk 11:13).” It is by God’s gracious gift that man is saved; still, man must live in hope. For history means suspense; over it there is written an invisible “not yet” (p. 77). Together with creation groaning and travelling, those who are the “first fruits of the Spirit” wait for the final redemption, for God’s last and ultimate word (see p. 78). To the rabbis, the messianic age is history improved, “a revised edition of what is now” (p. 79). What the Christian expects, however, is not an “improved world” but “a new heaven and a new earth.” He who is a new creature in Christ knows that he already lives in the New Age. He does not look so much for the benefits of that age as for God’s kingdom-to-come in the glorious return of a Person. This telos, this point beyond history, is “the New World Order—and yet salvation begins here and now!” (p. 81).

If Dr. Jocz’s position is correct, the polarity is not between the Synagogue and the Church, the Synagogue being related to the Old Testament only indirectly. For there was a time when the Synagogue was not, and there will be a time when the Synagogue will be no more (see p. 95). The polarity is really between the Jewish people, which transcends the limitations of the Synagogue, and the Church. There can be no such thing as the ‘Israel of God’ unless the Israelites are the continuing people of the Promise. The Synagogue could not be the people of God because they no longer had the Covenant. And so they start all over again: “As was the covenant of Moses, so is the covenant of the present age” (Heb 8:6). Jocz’s understanding of the “Israel of God” is: “It is not upon the covenant of the flesh, but upon the covenant of promise” (Rom 4:13). As far as St. Paul is concerned, this is the version of the law which the Jews had received from Moses, “the law of circumcision made without hands” (Rom 2:27). The covenant of promise is God’s word: the word that God promised to Abraham. God’s word is his mercy (Is 40:18).
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can be no doubt that between the Israel of the Sinaitic Covenant and the Israel of the fuller Covenant sealed on Calvary there is perfect continuity, for the latter is the completion of the former. "Old" Testa­ment and "New" are thus terms that can be misunderstood. They must not be taken as implying a defeat of God's purpose and His need to start all over again. In one way, there was a new beginning, the Incarnation; in another, the newness of the New Covenant is "a renewal of the old, only on a more permanent basis" (p. 115). Such is Dr. Jocz's understanding of the irrefragable promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

As far as God is concerned the Covenant with Israel stands: the emphasis upon the lasting value of the Covenant recurs in Jeremiah (cf. Jer 32:40; 50:5) and in the other Prophets (cf. Ez 37:26; Is 55:3). So far, then, as the Old Testament is concerned, the "new" Covenant is not new ab initio, but only a renewal of the old (pp. 115-116).

Since the Church at her most perfect is identical with the Israel according to the spirit, she may never abandon the historic Israel, the Israel according to the flesh. To do so would be a betrayal of God's promises. With fine insight, Dr. Jocz remarks:

If Israel were able to elude his destiny and to turn his back upon God once and for all, it would mean that man had the last word and that God was defeated. If this were the case there would be little hope for humanity, for in Israel's destiny is involved the destiny of mankind. This is an important point and lies behind St. Paul's reasoning in Romans. St. Paul, like the Prophets, is carried by the conviction that at no point in history is Israel an end in himself. In Israel's election God chooses mankind. If God, then, were to leave Israel to himself until he is ready to accept free grace, there is no hope for the rest of humanity. The answer is that we must take God's calling more seriously than Israel's refusal (p. 109).

In a way, the last sentence is the key phrase of the book. If the Church is to have a theology of election that takes its life from the New Testament, it must concentrate on God's call, as Scripture does. To look at the question the Israel according to the flesh poses, only in terms of her refusal—however long it may last—is to act the Pelagian, to make man the determiner of God. The primary factor in Israel's and man's destinies, however, is not their willing or their running but God's mercy (see Rom 9:16), for what He holds out is an "election of grace"
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(see Rom 11:5). All who accept this "last secret of God's inscrutable judgement" (p. 111) become the remnant that is saved here and now. In the eschatological future, all Israel will be saved, but in the present, only those who personally experience the salvation of the Lord.

Dr. Jocz does not seem to consider what Catholic theology calls baptism by desire: that the Holy Spirit and His sanctifying grace may dwell in those who, in the words of Pope Pius XII, are related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer by some unconscious yearning and desire, even though they are deprived of many precious gifts and helps from heaven, which can be enjoyed only in union with Christ in the Church (see Mystici Corporis, Washington: N.C.W.C., 1943, p. 64). His main concern is with conscious, lively faith in Jesus as the Lord.

One must appreciate Dr. Jocz's exegesis of the universality-texts of both Testaments, though one can hardly follow him in the assumption that the Septuagint was a translation made for the use of the Gentiles, in fact, that it was a Jewish missionary effort (see pp. 100-101). He also adopts the somewhat singular view that riza bages, the "root" of Romans 11:16, is the Christ, not the patriarchs from whose stock He springs. Is not mishon, "the first one or the beginning," among the titles given to the Messiah by the rabbis? he asks. This title, he thinks, may be a clue to the meaning of some manuscripts of John 8:25 which make Jesus say: "I am the beginning, I who speak to you." What God does "for the sake of the fathers," Dr. Jocz tells us, He does, not to reward their fidelity but to reveal His own (see pp. 104-106). The pre-existent Messiah is the root of Jesse; thus the sequence of the history of salvation is Messiah—Israel—the nations. The Gentiles are the wild shoots grafted into the olive tree that is Israel, the tree whose root is the Messiah (see pp. 113-114). Indeed, Jesus is in His own person the whole of Israel, root and branch. "Where Israel failed, the Messiah succeeds; what Israel was meant to be, the Messiah is—the perfect Servant of God" (p. 106). Dr. Jocz's exegesis of St. Paul's reference to "the holy root" does not seem to be supported by the context of the passage of which it is a part, but his general outlook—disregarding his Protestant bias against merit—is very much that of the Apostle.

1. This is the view of Origen in his Commentarium in Epist. B. Pauli ad Romanos, VIII, 11 (PG 14:1193). For patristic interpretations of St. Paul's meaning, see Myles M. Bourke, A Study of the Metaphor of the Olive Tree in Romans XI (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), pp. 72-76, 89-93.
St. Paul is the theologian of harmony between Jews and Gentiles—this no careful reader of his epistles will ever deny. The Synagogue, however, cultivates its separateness from the nations; it feels little, if any, responsibility for them, and not seeking the nations of the world, it cannot be the Israel of God. Concern for the Gentile world is the hallmark of Old Testament faith. Sacrifice on its behalf and vicarious suffering have their solid foundation in the Old Testament vision of Israel’s relationship to the Gentiles; she needs them and they need her because of the things God has entrusted to her for transmission to them. Moreover, in her suffering, “although little understood by the Jews themselves [she] keeps the Messiah and his people in an intimate relationship, for he is the co-sufferer with all suffering humanity” (p. 153). The persecution the Jews have had to suffer at the hands of Christians (“the pagan in the Gentile,” is Dr. Jocz’s phrase) is at bottom often Gentile rebellion against the Son of David who died on the cross for the sins of all.

Jew-hatred, in the last resort, is mutiny against God and his Anointed (cf. Ps 2). The very presence of the Jewish people serves to emphasize the link with the past and brings the Cross into the perspective of actuality. Jesus ceases to be a myth and becomes a challenging and embarrassing fact (p. 153).

He is an embarrassment to Christians who prefer to forget His link to His own people. He is an embarrassment to Jews as well; indeed, He is one to all the world.

For the Synagogue, therefore, Jesus is on a par with all the other false Messiahs who have appeared in Jewish history from time to time. And yet even the most critically minded Jew has to admit that in view of world history Jesus stands in a place of his own. He is a unique phenomenon and does not fit into the pattern of messianic pretenders either Jewish or Gentile. He stands not only before Israel but also before the world as the corrective of all false messianic idealism. As far as the Jews are concerned he is the great question-mark of his people’s conscience. In the vicissitudes of Israel’s pilgrimajour through history as God’s chosen people, the encounter with Jesus, his greatest Son, reopens the issue again and again. Jesus of Nazareth remains historic Israel’s greatest challenge (p. 16).

In his carefully argued work, Dr. Jocz has done Christian theology a service. There are times when one might wish his phrasing a little
modified so that his Jewish brothers would not be wounded needlessly. A constant source of regret, too, is his apparent unfamiliarity with Catholic theological writings. The contributions of Martin Luther and Karl Barth do not make the Catholic Christian position on grace and the relation of the two Testaments unworthy of attention. Though admirable, Dr. Jocz's volume leaves one with the conviction that in it the Christian message has been represented only partially to a people who must see it whole if they are to see it as the crowning of the love with which He called them.

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