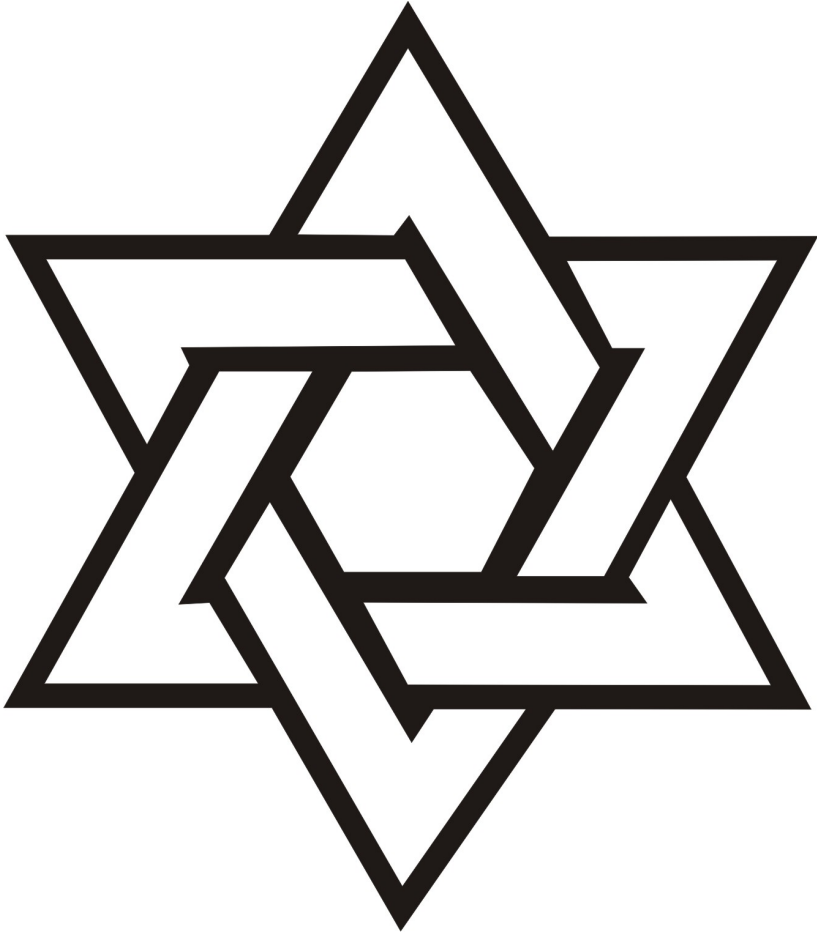


The Jewish Question

(La question juive, Paris, Dentu & Douniol, 1868)



Marie-Théodor Ratisbonne

Originally translated by
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December 2012

URL: <https://archive.org/details/TheJewishQuestion>

Reformatted/edited for e-readers:
April 2019

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Introduction

Maria Théodore Ratisbonne (1802 – 1884) was an important Catholic author, priest and missionary of Jewish provenience. In 1826, he was baptised and during his life was highly appreciated by the Catholic Church.¹

The Jewish Question (1868) is a suggested solution to the problem of the Jewish identity. During the 19th century, the definition of Jewish identity was influenced by various trends and perceptions.² From a wider perspective, Ratisbonne's answer here should be compared with other works of the period on the subject, including Karl Marx's "*Zur Judenfrage*".³

Ratisbonne's thesis is the necessary conversion of Jews to Catholicism, in view of what he considers the decadent Jewish currents, which did not provide a viable solution to the Jewish problem. The conversion suggested by Ratisbonne is also the inevitable outcome of the ideas and prophecies of the Gospel.

(We have used the KJV Bible for the translation of sources. Several Gospel citations in the original were expanded for further clarification. We have added an explanation on Cicero in footnote 7 and Gospel citations in footnotes 21 and 22)

¹ Martin Hehir, "Maria Theodor Ratisbonne." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 12. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 9 Dec. 2012 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12659b.htm>>.

² Frédéric Gugelot , De Ratisbonne à Lustiger. *Archives Juives* 1/2002 (Vol. 35), pp. 8-26.

URL : <https://web.archive.org/web/20081013215012/https://www.cairn.info/revue-archives-juives-2002-1-page-8.htm>.

³ Karl Marx/ Friedrich Engels - Werke. Berlin, Dietz Verlag, Berlin. Band 1. Berlin/DDR. 1976, pp. 347-377.
URL: http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01_347.htm

The Jewish Question

Chapter I

From the social and religious points of view, the Jews have been always in a separate position; it is for a good reason that now, more than ever, they attract the attention of the world. When we consider the stationary state in which they have remained for almost 2000 years, we wonder about the bizarre which suddenly spread among them; we wonder what the inclination of this movement is and what is the limit it must reach. Until recently, iron barriers separated this imperishable race from the peoples among which it vegetated; in contradiction to the law of assimilation which melts together into the same society the various elements of subjugated nations, only the Jews persevered in their isolation, inaccessible to the light of Gospel and the progress of Christian civilisation.

This state of somnolence lasted until the beginning of this century and during this long evolution, the Jews, introverted and obviously reprovved did not show in their sad history any vitality, any change, any point of contact with the Christians. It is stagnant water which does not merge with any of the surrounding rivers.

The purpose of this work is not to recall the cause of this striking decline, which is written in the Old and New Testament: it is the mystery of God's justice, the most memorable and significant of all the phenomena of history.

Nothing less than the worst social commotion ever mentioned in history was necessary to give the Israelites the first alarm.

Surprising fact, yet very little-noticed! Of all things emanated like lightning from the interior of the French Revolution, it is only one which survived in all its consequences, and precisely to this one the least attention was paid. On September 28th 1791, the Constituent Assembly, in the euphoria of omnipotence, proclaimed the emancipation of the Jews and allowed them to enjoy all the civil and political rights of French citizens. This initiative imposed itself gradually but not without resistance, first in all Catholic states, then in the Protestant and schismatic states, even in the Turkish and Arab countries.

France had to descend very low into the dark of incredulity to meet suddenly the infidelity of the Jews. But Providence, which converges everything for its

inscrutable designs, seems to have chosen the moment when the social edifice would noisily collapse in order to undermine the secular walls which separated the Jews from the Christian society. Beneath the thick clouds of dust created everywhere by so many ruins, the emancipation of the Jews was accomplished almost unnoticed. In fact, when the Israelites and Christians saw themselves facing each other in the same society after the black night, they remained surprised and embarrassed by this fraternity for a long time. The demarcation boundary, legally abolished, survived in habits, customs, instincts; the Jews, always rejected, stood some time away, without making use of their freedom, unless in order to increase the chances of their trade. Fifteen years of hesitation passed since the famous act of emancipation and, during this period, we cannot report any significant change in the actual situation of the Jews. A principle had been promulgated; the consequences were to emerge subsequently.

It was Napoleon, the powerful initiator of the new era, who conceived the idea of making possible the fusion of Jewish nationality into the French nationality. By a decree of May 30th 1806, he convoked in Paris a meeting of Jews from France, Italy and Holland, aiming to achieve the solution of several questions, the purpose of all being the harmonisation of the precepts of Moses with the exigencies of French law. The Israelite delegates had too much interest to preserve their titles and rights as citizens but not to estimate the terms of their profession of faith. They were more concerned about their well-being than about the law of Sinai. They dissimulated the inflexible terms of their religious faith and sacrificed several fundamental issues in order to avoid the alienation of the Emperor's goodwill. Thus, in their declaration of August 1806, they began by posing "that their religion ordered them to consider as "*supreme law* the law of the prince in civil and political matters and, consequently, even when their religious code or its attributed interpretations would include civil or political provisions disharmonious with the French Code, these provisions would therefore cease to govern them because, first and foremost, they must recognise the law of the prince and obey it."

At once, this strange preamble placed the Code Napoléon above the code of Moses. First of all, we see the provisions which animated the Jewish deputies empowered to solve on behalf of their brethren the questions submitted to them. The statement containing their official responses fully satisfied the Emperor who, wishing to attribute to the doctrine of the new Judaism a judgement and rule which it did not have previously, fancied to transform the assembly of the Israelite deputies into a kind of council, under the denomination of the Great Sanhedrin.

The Hebrew council met in Paris in the early days of February 1807, confirmed the previous decisions and formulated nine articles regarding marriage, divorce, polygamy and the civil as well as the political relations of the Jews with the Christians.

We will soon speak about the article concerning rabbinism. Let us note only that the decisions of the Great Sanhedrin were never trusted among Orthodox Jews, despite the support granted by Emperor's the government.

Napoleon, unknowingly continuing the plan of Providence, persisted continuously to dissolve the Jewish nationality in the French Empire; for the sake of this purpose, he ordered several measures to organise on new ground the ancient remainders of the Mosaic cult. On May 17th 1808, he founded the consistories, appointed rabbis, endorsed the decisions of the Great Sanhedrin and regulated in large proportions the affairs of the synagogue. On July 20th of the same year, another decree ordered the Jews to adopt, within the period of three months, a patronymic name and a family name be not taken from the Old Testament. If the imperial power did not accomplish the change of characters and physiognomies, in the long run, however, it produced unquestionable results because all these innovations, stripping the Jews of their own essence and introducing heterogeneous elements into the bosom of their religion, gradually brought to the total decomposition of the old Judaism.

Other causes also contributed to this crisis. The Jews, who have entered a licentious society, soon adopted its doctrines and habits. The philosophy of the eighteenth century became the guide for those of them who wanted to learn and to be considered as enlightened men; the professional life made many of them forget the religious practices. Finally, the example of bad Christians and the almost general indifference, dominant then in France, in matters of religion, accomplished the extinguishment of the sparkles of faith prevailing with the vast majority of Jews, as they received these from their forefathers.

During the period about we speak, the dissolving influence of incredulity undermined the faith of Jews as well as Christians; it seemed as if it had produced a general levelling. However, on this tabula rasa, the Providence opened to human frailty new means of salvation; it was possible to have the premonition of the mysterious words of St. Paul: *Conclusit Deus omnia in incredulitate, ut omnium misereatur.* (Romans 11:32 - *For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.*)

Since then, the influence of Christianity began to be felt; it did not prevail yet, but it became irresistible. Judaism, which subsisted immobile throughout the centuries as a corpse reduced to the state of a mummy, hardened and invulnerable under the hammer of persecutions, fell into pieces, as it moved closer to the Christian atmosphere; from this moment on there appeared the first signs of regeneration. Like the ancient Egypt grains found today, which flourished into a new harvest, the seeds of Judaism in various countries gave birth to flowers full of hope. These premises did not appear in the masses of the people, but some fruits of the mysterious work of grace could be seen. The transformation was taking place slowly in the spirits while outside nothing perceived yet, except the chaos, the sad cortege of licentiousness and irreligion. The Jewish generation which has disappeared with the last century took away the traditions, the inveterate prejudices and the obscure practices of the Talmud; the generation which followed and grew old under the Restoration, thought only to enjoy earthly life, regardless of the conditions of future happiness; finally, the Jews of later times, mostly educated in Christian schools or entirely deprived of religious education, seem to be estranged even to the memories of the outdated synagogue worship.

From here begins a situation which inaugurates a new phase, obviously abnormal and transient. The Jews are no more Jews; they are not yet Christians. They float randomly between past and future. Would it be possible that this situation be convenient to the descendants of Abraham, the father of believers? As a prophetic people shown off to the world and destined to serve as an example to all the other peoples, its impact upon society would never be indifferent and nowadays it acquires incredible power. Naturally clever and ingenious, possessed by the instinct of domination, the Jews have gradually invaded all avenues leading to wealth, dignities and power; their spirit gradually penetrated modern civilisation; they run the stock market, the press, the theatre, the literature, the government, the major means of communication on land and sea; by means of the ascendancy of their wealth and genius, they hold now the entire Christian society as if it was entrapped in a net.

The government of 1830 gave the synagogue an unlimited impetus. One of its first acts, dated February 8th 1831, was to place the rabbis in the same line with the ministers of other religions and assign them a salary from the public treasury. From the legal point of view, this innovation created a sort of Jewish clergy but from the point of view of religion, the rabbis have never been and cannot be ministers of the Old Testament. We know that according to the law of Moses, only the sons of Aaron and the descendants of the tribe of Levi had the mission to exercise sacerdotal functions; following the dispersion and the mixture of tribes, the Jews no longer

had neither priests nor sacrifices. This is the literal fulfilment of Hosea prophecy: “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim.”⁴

The rabbis, whose name means master or private tutor, were merely scribes, more or less educated in Law or casuists familiar with the Talmud, who taught the commentaries on religion. Later, they received a modest salary from the synagogue in order to formulate decisions on doubtful cases of the Talmud morality. Only those were their attributions, and they never posed as pastors or ministers of their religion. In the June 1846 edition of the Jewish publication entitled *Archives israélites* can be read an interesting note on French rabbinism. The current institution of rabbis, as ministers of their cult, dates only from 1808 and is the creation of Israelite delegates who, being shameful to openly announce France on the nullity and futility of rabbinical functions, attributed the rabbis of that period a fictional character, inconsistent with the formal law of the Old Testament.⁵

The royal decree of 1831 sanctioned this unusual anomaly providing the synagogue with an impossible priesthood. But, in fact, the rabbis, transformed into priests by the civil law, although they were state employees, remained without authority among the Jews; they found themselves subjected to the sarcasms of their friends and enemies alike. The hope had been that the creation of the rabbinate would restore some life to the dying synagogue; there were expectations of changes in the ceremonies, modifications in the offices, progress in the interpretations; some wanted reforms while others were against; all claimed to regenerate, by various means, the religion affairs. However, the rabbis, coated with an illusory power, incapable to support the role they had been assigned and perfectly content with their fate, opposed only an inertial force to the discording claims of their coreligionists.

Then the Jews divided themselves into a number of very distinct parties. Some of them, who can be named *indifferents* and are very numerous, have abandoned the synagogue and the religious practices. These are opportunists who know only the life of the present world and who consecrate their entire activity to the pursuit

⁴ Hosea 3:4. Cf. Hosea 3:5 “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”

⁵ Here are the sacred words of the Law of Moses: “And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.” (Numbers 3:10)

of pleasures and interests. The others are the *reformers*, retarded disciples of Voltaire's school; yet, they are always related by instinct rather than by conviction to their ancestors' faith. According to their own affirmations, they would like to make religion compatible with the century, are a formula of Judaism dressed in modern fashion with a dogma which would not contradict at all the senses and a worship which would not annoy at all the customs. The reformers differentiate themselves from the indifferent due to the fact that the latter, no longer possessing even the religious sentiment, do not preoccupy themselves in any manner with the decay or rehabilitation of the synagogue. The reformers connect themselves to beliefs which they do not practice and seek to harmonise them with the human systems. Being too busy with the earthly matters and being unable to rise themselves to the divine idea of religion, they would like to make it descend to them and thus satisfy at once both their thoughtless pride and their blinded conscience.

The third party, called *orthodox* or *conservative*, is composed of a large number of stubborn Jews who, either by conviction or by spirit of opposition, reject all the reform projects and claim loudly that the customs and prescriptions of the Talmud should be preserved. The number of members of this category is declining daily because they are not recruited at all from among the young, and much ignorance and hypocrisy exists among them.

There is another group named by the Jews themselves as converts to Christianity (*christianisants*)⁶.

These Israelites, who repudiate the denomination of Jews, admire the Catholic religion, but most of them go no further than the threshold of the Church. Fed with futile or erroneous readings, they imagine the God of the Christians as different from the God of Israel and dare not embrace the serious study of Christianity, fearing that they might be induced to leave their ancestors' religion. As if modern Judaism is the religion of Moses! As if they have not broken long ago the chain which linked them to the faith of the patriarchs! As if the Christian faith does not contain the entire Jewish faith! Furthermore, being mysteriously driven to the Church, they pronounce with reverence the name of Jesus Christ, they praise the evangelical morality, they frequently attend priests and sermons, they loudly express their vow and hope to see soon all Israel within Christianity. In fact, many

⁶ Strange lamentations on this subject can be read in the anthology entitled *Univers israélite* of July 1845, p.170

of them have accepted the regeneration sacrament: some publicly, others secretly; nowadays, there are Christian members in all major Jewish families of Europe.

Finally, the party which prevails today over all the other streams by the number of its members, and their distinction is the one which openly denies the Bible and the Hebrew cult in order to join the pursuit of a progress which they name *the idea*. By this word are recognised the more or less disillusioned disciples of the Saint-Simon, Fourier and other inventors of religions, who, as we know, have made their first conquests among the most prominent Israelites. This party, entitled the *progressive* party, has noble aspirations: it urges a universal fusion and in order to achieve this goal, it strongly claims the convocation of a synod composed of representatives of all the synagogues in the world. And which should be the mission of this great new Sanhedrin? *Hear o heavens! Listen O earth!* (Isaiah 1:2). Its mission will be to proclaim to the whole world the unity of God and the immortality of the soul.

Whoever will accept these two dogmas, they say, will thus be recognised as Israelite.

This is the textual sum of their theology. It certainly means the reduction of religion to its simplest enunciation; it would be necessary to assume that the atheists from the entire world have a very strong bad will to doubt so easily their acquiescence to a religion. However, this kind of formulation is not new, and it would be unnecessary that it should be revealed by a synod of rabbis. Already paganism, exhausted of idols, elevated itself to the level of this vague deism. Aristotle, Plato and Seneca were speaking of the unity of God. Among others, Cicero wrote these words: "Although God is unique, reference to it is made by various names; denying the existence of God would be an absurdity. ⁷ Without concluding with the pagans, let us remind that monotheism found an apostle also in Robespierre, who, during the synod of the Convention, deigned to grant the Supreme Being an existence document as well as a life certificate. We know the influence of this abstract dogma on the morality and prosperity of France.

Is the idea of progress enclosed here, in what is called by the odd term *liberal Judaism*? I cannot believe it since I have too good an opinion about the adepts of progress. However, I wonder how persons of good faith and talent can resume

⁷ De Natura Deorum., iv, 18. Book iv of *De Natura Deorum* was published in 1811 by Herman Heimark Cludius (1754 – 1835), under the pseudonym of Seraphinus, "in order to guide the discussion towards a need for a teaching authority centred in Church Councils and the Roman Pontiff." See: P.G.Walsh, *Cicero*, (Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, translated by H.C.P. McGregor, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 239 - 251

themselves with such a vague and vain theory. They do not doubt that if there is a God, Creator and Father of men, there must be a living relationship between man and his Creator? What is this relationship? Why was it broken? How can it be revived? These are the vital questions of religion, which concern our future destiny; those questions have not been created following the human disputes; those questions have been resolved by the Old and New Testament. Rejecting those sacred books means sentencing oneself to an eternal doubt, even if we decorate it with the titles of science, progress, idea, monotheism or liberal Judaism.

Let's speak out, frankly. These men know what they do not want, but they do not know what they want. They certainly do not want Judaism anymore, but they do not want Christianity yet. The proof is that while denying *en bloc* the Revelation of Moses, they pursue with an implacable zeal those of them who embrace the Catholic faith. The latter, as we have already said, do not renounce the Old Testament on any point; those who, on the contrary, accuse them, deny themselves all the teachings of faith and all the traditions of their forefathers. Logically speaking, on whom should be applied the epithet *apostate*?

In spite of their profound differences, the various parties that we have pointed out still have a point of contact. All of them preserve the bitter memories of the persecutions targeted against the Jews for eighteen centuries, because the shadow of these calamities still pursues them. In fact, a virtue more than magnanimous would be necessary to erase with a generous oblivion the bloody evidences of their history. But the fault and misfortune of the Jews is that they do not open their eyes on the cause of these secular unprecedented persecutions. In the course of time, we have seen many peoples becoming the prey of other peoples. But those unjust attacks had their limits and tainted only specific periods and areas, taking place only for a limited period, not simultaneously and alternatively in all the countries of the world. The persecution of the Jews had this double character of perpetuity and universality. This is a unique phenomenon which cannot be explained by human beings; this phenomenon is too large to be explained by a restricted cause. If you assign this phenomenon to intolerance, it should be necessary to go back to the cause of this intolerance and not hold Catholicism the unique responsible because the same incessant persecutions occurred among heathen, Protestants, Greek, Muslims, at all times, in all places, under all forms of government.

If we do not want to open the Gospel in order to penetrate this lugubrious mystery, let us read the prophets of Israel. We will cite only Moses: (14) *But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all*

my commandments, but that ye break my covenant” (Leviticus 26:14-15), “will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass” (Leviticus 26:19), “I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it; And I will scatter you among the heathen...” (Leviticus 26:32-33), “And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them.”(Leviticus 26:39) ⁸.

We will not continue those terrible quotations, which appear more frightening in the other prophetic books. But by bringing them closer to the history of Jews, would it be possible to ignore the intervention of God's hand in the explosion of a disaster lasting nearly two thousand years?

Does it mean that the Catholic Church was the sword of divine justice? No, this was not its mission. On the contrary, the Catholic Church has moderated the spontaneous rages of peoples; through the organ of the pontiffs, it has strongly condemned by the body of the pontiffs, the sinners of these cruel enmities, even when these were only in retaliation. The Catholic Church covered the trembling Jews with its aegis; it has not confined itself only to remove them from the popular passions, it has opened inviolable asylums where they found safety. Rome gave the example of the protective charity love; it conceded the Jews to a separated quarter area and several other cities have imitated the initiative of the Roman pontiffs. Thanks to these places of refuge, Jews lived together around their synagogue, according to their own laws, under the authority of their spiritual leaders and enjoyed the full and complete exercise of their religion. From here come the Ghettoes, the origin of which is attached to the idea of hospitality, too forgotten and too calumniated today. Philanthropy draws dark pictures and rightly deplores obsolescence and filth. But it is forgotten that these characteristics date from a time when all towns, in general, had the same appearance. During the Middle Ages, it was not the vanity of the Christian civilisation to transform into a palace the fragile dwellings of this world. Christians, travellers on earth, aspired only at the splendour of heavenly Jerusalem. If, with the progress of the century, the cities of earthly exile were particularly beautified, it is not surprising that the Jews did not follow this trend. The ghettos remained immobile, like the people who lived there. The Jews preserved the ghettos as they are and it even seems that they do not dislike these dilapidated houses for even today they still prefer them. Since the beginning of his reign, Pope Pius IX has put at their disposal all quarters of Rome, but they persist not to leave the Ghetto and they voluntarily remain linked to it.

⁸ Leviticus 26. The citation of each verse is not found in the original.

Obviously, the Israelites commit an injustice and ingratitude when today they revolt against an institution which has saved them in the past.

Chapter II

The digressions which we thought necessary to make about the various factions dividing the Jews did not move us away from our subject because these are elucidations of what remains us to say about the crisis which results from the confusion of so many disparate elements.

The reformers, as well as the Orthodox, have their organs in the press. But, generally speaking, the Israelites publications do not allow the penetration of the intestine agitations of the synagogue and they avoid as much as possible to include the Christian world in those confidences. Their concern to avoid any serious and dogmatic discussion is remarkable. The most avoided is the important question of Messiah, the only one which interposes itself between Jews and Christians! Once this issue is settled and Jesus Christ is recognised as the Saint of Israel, promised to the patriarchs and foretold by the prophets, the separation wall will instantly fall and the word of Messiah will be the light of Jews as it is the law of Christians. This is what fear those involved in religious matters; it seems that their fear of being enlightened brings them not only to pervert the meaning of their sacred prophecies but also to deny, against the script of the Old Testament, the doctrine of Messiah and the redemption of the world. Today, the Jews do not accept any more this fundamental point of the religion of their fathers; they reject all together the mystery of the original sin and the promise of the Redeemer. Alternatively, if they still invoke the Messiah in the mandatory recitation of psalms and prophetic books which they read every Saturday during the synagogue worships, without assigning any meaning to their words; they consider those recitations as outdated formulas. They even declare that the Messiah should not be expected and no other emancipation should be requested beyond the one obtained in their political situation. For us, Messiah came on February 28th, 1790 with the Declaration of Human Rights. These are the words of Mr. Cahen, one of the most authoritative modern Jews and the translator of the Bible.⁹

⁹ *Archives israélites*, October 1847, p.801

*Pierre-Louis Parisis (1795 – 1866) is the author of *Liberté de l'Église. Deuxième examen. Des tendances*. (Paris:J.Lecoffre, 1845)

At this stage of the decadence of Judaism, the influential Israelites turned to the July government to solicit the support they could not find any more in their faith. By the grace of the sympathies of which they were the object, they obtained a constitution which was a true civil constitution of the Israelite cult, formally released as a royal ordinance. This document, dated May 25, 1844, attracted a very little public attention; only a few persons seemed to understand the immense impact of an organisation which places Judaism placed under the direct and immediate authority of a Christian minister in charge of the cult department in France. At that time, Mgr. Bishop of Langres, was the only one who pointed out the consequences in the famous pamphlet *Tendances*.* It is enough to take a look at the main provisions of this royal ordinance to realise the deep impact it had on the traditions and hierarchy of the synagogue. Thus, it was established by law that the religion of the Israelites would have its residence in Paris. A central consistory composed of laymen and placed, as the Holy Synod of Russia, in the hands of the government, directs the spiritual and temporal aspects of the cult; it can be dissolved by ordinance and, in this case, the reins of the synagogue are entrusted to an ad interim administration, nominated by the Minister. Under this supreme consistory there are departmental consistories which report about the fulfilment of their duties to the prefects.

This structure, so contradictory to the spirit and letter of the Old Testament, resulted in the complete secularisation of the Jewish religion. Absorbed into the political substance, henceforth Judaism has found itself simply governed as a branch of civil administration. But the Israelites, increasingly fascinated by the official protection, the object of which they gradually became, applauded this strange situation which they called *progress* and they were unwilling to understand that human support is rather fragile, especially at a time when the entire society is the prey of perpetual vicissitudes.

Except several amendments, the same arrangement was applied on the Israelites of Algeria by means of an order dated 9 November 1845. The weird side of this last action is that since Algeria is under the military regime, the administration of mosaic cult found itself, in fact, within the attributions of the minister of war and thus, it is an army general who

exercises on the Algerian synagogue the supremacy exercised by great priest in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the consistories eliminate the rabbis as much as possible and recruit members from among traders, lawyers, artists and the rich; whoever they may be, undoubtedly they are all very honourable and we accept that they should be accustomed with the study of humanistic sciences but, in general, they are completely unfamiliar with theological studies and synagogue rites. Will the light come from here?

Let us notice that these disruptions are not specific to France and occur more effervescently in other countries. If the framework of the present study would allow it, we will point out here the rabbinical schisms fully accomplished in England, Austria, Prussia, Russia and Poland. Everywhere, a new spirit stirs the remnants of Israel; everywhere on the globe, wherever they are scattered, the Jews agitate themselves and aspire at a new order of things. Obviously, the present time is a transition from eighteen centuries of immobility in the past to a future regeneration, which will be performed only by the Gospel. The civil and political emancipation of the Jews has been only a prelude of a higher and fuller liberation. The ingredients of a new edifice, which is already beginning to grow, are embodied from the ruins of the synagogue; although the new edifice has only lately grown from earth, it is visible to all.

What are the consequences of this crisis? On the one hand, the inevitable contact between Israelites and Christians makes the old repugnance vanish daily. The Jews are henceforth involved with civilisation, with the religious discussions, with the general life of the Christian society. Therefore, in spite of themselves, as they are wrapped and invaded by the breath of Christianity, which constantly penetrates, fertilises and vivifies all social elements. On the other hand, Providence, having cleared the path, gave birth on the floor of the Church to enterprises designed to meet the new necessities. Providence had chosen instruments even among the children of Israel, and today no longer can be counted those who have sought and found peace and happiness in the Church of light. The apostolic zeal which stimulated St. Peter and St. Paul so earnestly, woke up once again in order to act; an immense charity is deployed for the benefit of the Jews.

Everything induces us to believe that with the blessing of the Father of all faithful, with the aid of prayer, the divine grace will bring back to the paths of faith the lost sheep. The time of promised mercies of Sion has come; it is the signal of consolations announced to the Church. "*Tu exurgens miseribis Sion quia tempus miserendi ejus, quia venit tempus.*"¹⁰

¹⁰ Psalms 102:12 -13 (12) *But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations. (13) Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.*

⁹ Genesis 22:18

Chapter III

We have affirmed that the main obstacle which separates the Jews from the great Catholic family is the fear to betray the faith of their fathers and the instinctive horror they experience once they contemplate the worship of a God other than the God of Abraham. The origin of this obstacle is only a study deficiency because they conceive Christianity as a religion different from Judaism, while this idea is a stipulation entirely opposed to the truth. The Gospel, far from abolishing the dogmas of the Old Testament, propagated them among all the nations of the earth. Actually, Christianity is the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs of Israel: "*And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice*".¹¹ Therefore, it is a capital mistake to believe that by accepting the Christian faith, the son of Israel abjures the God of his ancestors. On the contrary, the Gospel recognises and proclaims that the God of goodness is faithful to His promises and what He solemnly announced is magnificently accomplished.

Cardinal Gousset said that "an institution can flourish and grow by following the plan of its creator without ceasing to be substantially the same. This is the Christian religion. We always see it unchanged from the beginning of the world. We have always recognised the same God as its creator, the same Christ as its mediator. We have always recognised the same goal, the same means, the same truths, either as representation or reality, following the understanding capacity of the human spirit. God has not taught men at one time the opposite of what He had taught them on a different occasion. The faith of the patriarchs was not altered by the preaching of Moses. Although more expanded, the symbol of Christians is not opposed to that of Hebrews. The primitive teachings given to the patriarchs were renewed and developed under the written Law, explained and completed by Jesus Christ, who came not to *destroy*, but to *accomplish* the Law and the Prophets: "*Non veni solvere legem aut prophetas, adimplere sed*".¹²

Bossuet explains the same truth in different words: "The Catholic Church fulfils all the previous centuries by a sequence which cannot be contested. The Law comes

¹² S.É. Le Cardinal Gousset, *Théologie dogmatique*, (Paris, Lecoffre 1879), v.1, p.317. Cf. Matthew 5:17 "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.*"

ahead of the Gospel. The succession of Moses and the patriarchs is nothing more than similar to that of Jesus Christ. We believe in the Messiah whose essence is to be expected, to arrive, to be recognised by posterity which will last as long as the world lasts. *Jesus Christ exists today, existed yesterday and will exist for ever and ever*".¹³

Thus, by entering the Church, the Israelites find themselves in their own family. The Gospel was spread in the world by the Jews. The apostles of Jesus Christ, messengers of God's word, were all Jews. The early primitive church in Jerusalem was composed only by Jews. Today, the greatest, the most honoured, the most beloved in Rome and throughout the Catholic world is the Immaculate Virgin Mary, daughter of Israel. The Holy Pontiff, seated on the supreme throne of the Church, the successor of Simon Peter, the first Pope, came from the race of Jacob. Apostle Paul, who brought the light of the Gospel to the extremities of earth, while speaking about the Jews, wrote the following words: "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I." ¹⁴

It is true that the children of Israel, who have the immense joy of embracing the Christian faith, disavow the Talmudic superstitions of those among their fathers who have fallen into the darks of infidelity. But, thanks God, the Israelites have other ancestors who have remained faithful and by whom they relate to the faith of the most worthy and most illustrious of their ancestors.

Another most vulgar objection cannot be attributed but to a blameworthy ignorance which blames the Christians for worshipping three gods. We will place it on the same level with the accusation that the Christians worship the Holy Virgin. The Catholic Church worships only one unique God, the thrice holy God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is the Christian apostolate which, reversing idols and polytheism in its passage, conveyed everywhere the knowledge of the God of Israel. The dogma of the unity of God had to remain in its mysterious simplicity until the period of a more mature humanity which was capable of a higher initiation. Previously, in the very text of the promulgation of this sacred dogma, Moses uses three terms: *Hear, O Israel, The LORD, our God, is one LORD*. Always and still today, the Jews invoke the name of the unique God by a single triple invocation: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." We do not pretend to quote here the words of the Old Testament which veil the mystery of the Holy Trinity, because our purpose

¹³ Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire naturelle*, part II, §13. Cf. *Chefs d'oeuvres de Bossuet. Discours sur l'histoire universelle. Sermons, extraits divers*, (Paris, Bernardin –Bechet,1875), p.278 .

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 11:26

is not to publish a thesis of theology. We confine ourselves to sustain that this impenetrable dogma does not alter in any way the doctrine of the Unity of God and that it was clearly revealed by the Holy Scriptures. It is not the role of the human spirit to penetrate this dogma. If the intimate essence of visible things escapes the investigations of reason, who could be surprised to find himself facing an august mystery when the Invisible, the Incomprehensible, the eternal Being is concerned?

However, those among the Israelites who have stirred many of their prejudices, still face another truth which they do not understand. They acknowledge that Jesus Christ was the wisest of philosophers and the holiest of men; they admire the sublime essence of his morality, but they do not confess his divinity. This denial contains a flagrant contradiction: if in fact we pay homage to the sanctity of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, how can it be supposed that He could allow the adoration of his person? It would have been a more lugubrious idolatry than the one it came to abolish. And if He has taught the world an entirely divine morality, how is it possible to believe that this morality had been founded on illusion and lie? There is no middle ground. Jesus Christ is what He had revealed to us: either He is the Son of God incarnated in human nature, a truth which forms the basis of all Christianity or He is an impostor and the Gospel must be torn. Moreover, the Old Testament clearly exhibits the divinity of Messiah. The writings are abundant with proofs in the psalms of David and in the prophets. Isaiah spoke of Him in chapter 7: “...a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”, which means *God with us*. This prophecy is consistent with the following: “...God himself will come to save you”¹⁵. “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: ... say unto the cities of Judah (v.3): ... Behold your God! (v.9)”¹⁶ The same prophet continues: “Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I.”¹⁷ And the prophet Zechariah speaks in these terms: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD.”¹⁸

Generally speaking, the Jews either do not read the Holy Scriptures or they rely on the interpretations of their rabbis, who do not want to open the eyes. But how can we be untouched by those testimonies, if we listen with a fair heart? When Jesus Christ came on earth, the doctors of the Law probably did not disregard the

¹⁵ Isaiah 35:4

¹⁶ Isaiah 40:3,9

¹⁷ Isaiah 52:6

¹⁸ Zechariah 10:2

divine character which the Scriptures ascribed to the Messiah. The essence of their blindness was to deny from Jesus Christ His divinity. This is so true that the high priest, addressing himself to Christ, tells Him: "*I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God?*" (Matthew 26:63). In another circumstance, Jesus Christ himself asked his apostles what people thought of Him and when Simon Peter answered Him: "*... Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matthew 16:16), this profession of faith caused no surprise among the disciples, among whom the tradition concerning the divinity of Messiah was widespread.

The real cause which hides this mystery to the Jews is that they do not have the idea of the immense love which is in God. Because God himself is only love and this love is revealed, incarnated, in order to unite with man. Union is the notion of love. The entire Christian doctrine follows from this original truth.

We answer another objection. Jews who read their own prophecies argue non-fulfilment. They say that their sacred books reveal that the Messiah will bring peace to the world, will eradicate any war, any discord and will reunite all the peoples under his peaceful sceptre! When, in what country, these wonders ever existed? Never peace or virtue ruled in the world.

Apparently right, this is how the opponents of Christianity speak. Their error is ancient; it follows from the false idea which they conceived about the messianic oeuvre. They hoped for a terrestrial triumph and requested from their Messiah only the worldly riches, while his divine mission is to restore man, to reconcile him with God, his Father and to bring him in the heavenly fatherland. The Old Testament and the Gospel also mention two very distinct advents of Messiah. The first advent was to be accomplished in the humblest conditions: it is the birth of the God-man who, through his humiliations, his sufferings and death, expiates for the sins of the world. The second advent will be made with great noise and great majesty. At that time, Jesus Christ will no longer appear in the world as Saviour and victim of expiation. Jesus Christ will reveal Himself as Judge of the live and dead. Only then we will see the full accomplishment of the beautiful words which herald the glory of the Church. The Jews hold themselves to prophecies about the second advent and do not take into consideration the preceding prophecies. This confusion itself obscures their eyes and shelters their incredulity.

It should be understood, I repeat, that in those pages we have not thought to conclusively refute all the objections which prejudices, ignorance or bad faith have accumulated against the Catholic faith. Our sole desire is to bring a vital issue to the

attention of serious minds. Of course, we do not address ourselves to the frivolous, who consider life to be only a game. We have in our view the right hearts of those who embrace joyfully the truth, if it was clearly exposed to them. Those we have often provided a reflection to which we would like to answer in the end. They tell us that the Christians are not worth more than the Jews, their way of life is not different from our own and therefore why not remain what we are? I concede that there is some truth in this assertion and I grant even more because, certainly, there are many Christians who are worth less than the Jews. But what is the meaning of this argument? The clouds which obscure the sun and its light can contest its fertility? The sanctity of religion can be compromised by those who reject its precepts and transgress its morality? Undoubtedly, if the contemporary Israelites had the good fortune to live in a truly Christian society, they would judge the tree by its fruits. They would not resist the attraction of the Christian spirit, they would taste the great pleasure of the teachings which produce an inexhaustible germination of holy works, they would quit effortlessly a hollow and sterile Judaism in order to enjoy the peace and the invigorating consolations which piety is pouring into the soul.

It must be agreed that, more than all other contradictions, the customs of degenerated Christians alienate the Israelites from Christianity. Those who read the Gospel are wise enough to understand the consequences. When they understand from all sides, in their social relations, the realities which are in contradiction with the teachings, when they consider the devotion allied with the disorders, with the futilities, with the worldly vanity, they lose confidence and are outraged by the very people who should gain them for God. How many of them would be illuminated if they met on their way some of those truly faithful souls whose whole life is like a fulfilment of the words of the Gospel!

The exemplary apostolate will create an irresistible impression on them.

However, despite all impediments, Israel will convert. This is the faith of the Church. The prophet says: *“Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”*¹⁹ An infinity of words from the Old and New Testament announce with certainty this reappearance which will renew the world and the unanimous teaching of the doctors indicate the felicitous consequences of this great act of God's Mercy. The great Apostle says: (11) *“...Have they [i.e the Jews] stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall*

¹⁹ Hosea 3:5

salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy (12) Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? (13) For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: (14) If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. (15) For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? (16) For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. (17) And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; (18) Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. (19) Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. (20) Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: (21) For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. (22) Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. (23) And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. (24) For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (25) For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (26) And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: (27) For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. (28) As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. (29) For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. (30) For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: (31) Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. (32) For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.²⁰

Yes, we repeat here what we have said elsewhere: soon will come the time when God, exiting His impenetrable mystery, like Jacob who woke up from his painful sleep, will remember the prodigal child: “*Suscepit Israë̄l puerum suum recordatus*

²⁰ Romans 11:11-29 in the original, enlarged in the translation to Romans 11:11-32

miseri cordiæ suæ".²¹ He will rise and with maternal voice will say to the children of the Church: This son was lost, but is found again! He was dead and is revived! The humiliated bones of Israel shall be deeply thrilled by a new life. *Et exultabunt ossa humiliata*.²² Then, the old people of God, precipitating from the south and the north wind, will fall at the foot of the cross and the Saviour of the world will remove the bloodstain from their forehead.

According to the Apostle, the vocations of God are irrevocable and therefore, after having provided the foundations of the Church, the people of Israel will reappear in the last days at the crowning of the immortal edifice.

²¹ Luke 1:54 "He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy."

²² Psalms 50:10. In KJV it is Psalms 51:8 "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."