

THE FUTURE OF THE CONTINENTAL JEWS

PROBLEMS OF EMANCIPATION

By Walter Zander

IN 1939 THE number of Jews living on the European Continent, including U.S.S.R., was about 9,000,000. Nobody knows how many of them will survive their plight. Hitler has repeatedly vowed their destruction, and according to reliable reports more than a million Jews have already perished. The remnant will be found in utmost misery and destitution. The first task of a Jewish policy therefore must be to feed the starving and to save their lives. The second task will be the reunion of families which have been broken up by deportation to the ghettos and by deliberate separation of husbands, wives and children.

Then comes the problem of reintegration into the fabric of social and economic life. This will meet with great difficulties, at least in the countries west of Russia. Positions, previously held by Jews, are either destroyed or in other hands, of which many will have acquired them *bona fide*. Furthermore, anti-semitic education and propaganda, poured out for years, will make themselves severely felt. But even if one could hope that with a collapse of Nazism the world of Nazi-thought would also disappear-and there are indications of strong pro-Jewish feeling on the continent-the essential fact remains that the foundations upon which Jewish life has been built for 150 years are shaken, and the very ideals of that period are passing through a fundamental crisis. The re-institution of the Jews therefore is not only a material but also a spiritual problem of the first order.

ORIGINALLY THE emancipation of the Jews was based on ideas and conditions of the 18th century. Religion then was in decline and secularism in the ascendant. Rationalistic enlightenment had prepared the French Revolution with its ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, culminating in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which was to inaugurate a new era of history. It was the beginning of continental democracy, of free competition and the dawn of the National State which was to exert so great an influence on the human soul.

Today the world looks different. Democracy has been challenged, and has almost brought the government machines of Italy, Germany and France to a complete standstill. Economic individualism, as it developed, was unable to solve the social problem which it created, and voices from all camps, including the Churches, call for intervention by the State. The national State finally has become so much an independent master of its own conduct, that nearly all agree about the necessity of a federation, a union, or some other super State authority. A restoration of the old world is impossible, and a new emancipation of the Jews will have to face those forces which are likely to shape the future of the European continent.

The first of these powers is Soviet Russia, which has gone far beyond the thoughts of 1789. She has replaced individual liberalism by collective socialism. The very idea of social justice - rightly or wrongly conceived - has been made the basis of the State, and every problem is approached from this angle. The question of the Jews therefore reduced itself, as soon as their legal disabilities were abolished, to the task of their integration into socialistic society. This was difficult enough; for the Jews had been engaged largely in trade, small craftsmanship and professions, and thus they were severely hit by the nationalization of industries. There was a widespread Jewish declassment for many years, and only through the Five Year Plans did the Jews gradually become re-absorbed.

In the political sphere the Soviets have replaced the national State by the conception of a multi-national Union, bound together by the idea of socialism. Even the word Russia has been abolished from the name of the U.S.S.R.; and as in mediaeval Christianity it did not matter much whether one was Spanish, Italian or French, provided one was a good Catholic, in U.S.S.R., nationality has become again of secondary importance. The creation of an idea superior to nationality has been one of the greatest achievements of the Soviets. Today men of various nations all over the Soviet area are singing:

*From great Moscow to the farthest border
From our Arctic Seas to Samarkand
Everywhere man proudly walks as master
Of his own immeasurable fatherland.*

And this is sung also by the Jews. They have been given the right to take part in Soviet life to the same extent as all its other members, and they share its ideals which have proved so powerful.

On the eve of June 22nd, 1941, the number of Jews within the U.S.S.R. (including the annexed territories of Eastern Poland and Bessarabia) amounted to 5,250,000. It can be well assumed that in case of victory Soviet ideas will spread, and thus the great majority of European Jews will live directly or indirectly under Soviet influence.

THE SECOND POWER likely to shape the New Europe is Christianity. Up till a short time ago there was not much likelihood of a Christian revival in the immediate future. The great Christian communities of Spain, Italy and Germany had either given up resistance against the Nazi-order or actively joined it. Some even had accepted the most ruthless anti-Semitism, as the Roman Catholic prelate Tiso; President

of Slovakia; who proclaimed it to be a *Christian duty* to rid the country of the Jews. Then came the fall of France, accompanied by a strange theology : that France had sinned; that she had to accept complete defeat - including the Nazi order and that only her crucifixion could lead to resurrection. Against such teaching the Swiss theologian Karl Barth protested at the time in a memorable letter, which may well become a document of political history.

Today there are unmistakable signs of a French resurrection. There are, of course, all kinds of groups joining together in the national revival; but Christianity is taking a leading part and furnishing the Fighting French with a theology. Catholics and Protestants in France have joined to set up "an irrevocable *No*" against Nazi idolatry. But more than that. French Christianity has stood a severe test, when she had the strength to fight not only for herself but also for the Jews. How easy it would have been to have kept silent. After all, the hunted were not even French. They belonged to the most helpless group of all; they were Jewish aliens. But France, beaten and humiliated, stood up - *et resurrexit* - and without heeding her own danger, took sides with the despised, proclaiming fearlessly that all men, aryans and non-aryans, Christians and Non-Christians, French and Non-French, are brothers created by the same God, and when in face of the persecution the Archbishop of Toulouse broke out with the cry: "*France, France, bien-aimée France, ce n'est pas toi . . .*", a strength was revealed which may be powerful enough to make the French cathedrals a rallying point for all the spiritual forces of the tortured continent, to impress itself deeply into the Soviet world, and even to link up one day with that which has been left of Christianity in Germany.

Self-denial in the interest of others has perhaps saved more than the soul of France, 'and created the conditions of future leadership. If furthermore one considers that some of the profoundest thinkers of our time, men like Berdyaev and Maritain, are Christians, the idea of a Christian renaissance has become more than a Utopia; and whilst during the first Jewish emancipation religion was losing ground, today it has become a political possibility that besides Soviet Russia a revived Christianity may have its say in the future of Europe. A new Jewish emancipation therefore will have to find its relationship with both of them.

UNIQUE AS THE opportunities are which the U.S.S.R. has given to all its peoples in the economic, social and political field, for the Jews there remain several great problems. There is firstly the question of language. For in the sphere of Jewish cultural life the Soviets have not admitted Hebrew, in which the Jews have expressed their greatest creations, and which has been revived in modern Palestine, but Yiddish, a dialect of medieval German intermixed with Hebrew, which has been spoken by the Jews of Eastern Europe for centuries. For Yiddish, however, the Jews of the modern Soviet world feel no longer any great enthusiasm. It is too deeply connected with the persecutions and the narrowness of the ghetto. Thus

when war broke out the number of children in Jewish schools had dwindled down to about 18 per cent, and the development in other spheres of Jewish cultural autonomy has been similar.

The second problem is Palestine. The establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine appears to the Communists as petty-bourgeois sentimentality on the side of the Jews and as colonial imperialism on the side of the British. For both reasons the Soviets have cut off every connection with such activities. Zionism is strictly forbidden, and many Zionist leaders have been sent to prison.

THE LAST AND gravest issue is that of religion. Whatever one may think of the importance of religion for the modern Jew, nobody can deny that religion for thousands of years has been the most characteristic element of the Jewish people. It has been for the Jews at least the same as what philosophy and art were for the Greeks, and law for the Romans. A policy therefore which sees in religion nothing but a means for "spiritual" oppression" and aims at the complete "emancipation of the masses from religion" is bound to cut off the age-long tradition of Jewish cultural life.

If one, however, accepts religion not only as a cultural value but in the full sense of the word, the problem becomes even more difficult. For Communism conceives man essentially in his relationship to society, whilst religion sees the centre of man in his relationship to the divine. This divine relationship for the religious Jew is indeed the very centre of the Jewish people. For Jewry to him is neither a race nor a nation, but a covenant with God. In this sense therefore Maritain was right when he called the Jews a "mystical body", and it is significant that for so great a psychologist as Dostoevski "the Jew - even the modern and enlightened Jew - cannot be conceived without God".

The Jewish religious community therefore is fundamentally different from what the Communist society claims to be. But on the other hand the Soviet world itself is much richer in religious elements than many Communists would admit; and these religious elements may become one day the basis for the future development.

Today it can well be assumed that the, great majority of Jews in the U.S.S.R., like all its other peoples, have accepted the Soviet creed; but it would not be the first time in Jewish history that a small remnant has had to preserve the innermost element of the true Jewish tradition.

THE CHRISTIAN community on the other hand, like religious Jewry, is essentially spiritual. Between both exist therefore the conditions for a deep understanding. But as Christianity conceives herself as the fulfilment of Judaism, she has often been tempted to consider herself superior; and the Christian attitude towards Jews for many centuries has been directed, quite apart from the persecutions, either to conversion by

baptism or to separation by ghettos. Emancipation of the Jews and tolerance were only brought about by the forces of secular enlightenment, and thus many Jews felt themselves forced towards the secular side where essentially they did not belong. Today the question of the emancipation is again at stake. At the same time Christianity is fighting for her own revival. It is a unique historic situation. Both have fundamentally a spiritual interest, and it would be a tragedy if the old mistakes should be repeated.

The first condition of Jewish-Christian relationship should be profound humility on both sides and, based upon that, the recognition of spiritual equality. That would not only lead to mutual enrichment, but it would create also the only basis upon which the inherent religious problems can unfold themselves. In the past much harm has been done by the assumption that the world in which the Jews lived was Christian. Today however, religion - in the words of Berdyaev - has become so personal a matter that it may not be possible any longer to describe any whole nation either as Christian or non-Christian.

AMONG THESE competing powers the survival of Jewry will finally depend upon its own inner strength. During the first emancipation we Jews have perhaps too readily accepted the thoughts of the surrounding world which seemed to solve our problems so easily. This time a greater and more constructive effort is needed on our side. It must be based on our innermost forces which have been challenged to the utmost by the unprecedented sufferings of these years, and will recur to the conceptions of duty and service which have always

been at the bottom of Jewish teaching. Much thought has been devoted to the idea of Human Rights, since they were proclaimed 150 years ago. It may be time now to stress again also the opposite side of obligations, and a "Declaration of Human Duties" could do a great deal of good. We Jews in any case should link up the new emancipation with the conception of *service*. That, moreover, would be in accordance with the oldest traditions ; for already the decalogue is based on the eternal "Thou Shalt".

Such an attitude would help furthermore to build up a binding link between Communism and Christianity; for the idea of service is central to both - different as their allegiances are - and service is the conception in which both could find the foundations of their relationship.

It would also influence some practical problems of internal Jewish policy. Today Jewry is divided in two main parties, one aiming at the assimilation of the Jews to the nations in which they live, the other at the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. Both ways seem to contradict and exclude each other. The recognition, however, of the spiritual principle of service - which indeed is the binding element everywhere - as the superior common aim of both parties will help to create common ground between them and to make both solutions possible. National life in Palestine for one part of Jewry and integration in the countries of the dispersion for another part are well compatible ; and if we succeed in making service a reality, the benevolent influence will extend far beyond the sphere of the Jewish question.