

# A change of climate

Autor(en): **Leuner, H.D.**

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mit Augen der Liebe sehen lernen; wie dringlich! *Mit unseren Ohren:* wir würden in Liebe ihre Seufzer und Anklagen hören; wieviel ist ihnen aufgestaut! *Mit unserem Mund:* wir würden ihnen in Liebe in Gütiges, Frieden, Trost und wahrhaftig auch das Zeugnis vom Heil in Jesus Christus sagen können. *Mit unseren Füßen:* wir würden in Liebe zu ihnen gehen oder für sie Fürsprache tun. *Mit unseren Händen:* wir würden ihnen in Liebe dienen wollen.

Ob wir, die in dieser Kirche versammelt sind, uns zu solchem Aufbruch der Liebe zurüsten und stärken lassen wollten? Ob wir nun zu unseren Gemeinden heimkehren und auch *sie* dafür gewinnen wollen?

«Die Liebe Christi dringet uns also.» So ist *ein christlicher Jude zum Dienst an den Heiden ausgezogen*. Treue um Treue. Gott erwecke uns zu seiner Liebe, damit wir Christen aus den *Heiden — Israel geben*, was wir ihnen allzulang schuldig geblieben sind.

Amen.

## A CHANGE OF CLIMATE

By H. D. LEUNER, London

At the very outset we ought to define the orbit of this article. We do not mean to describe, and even less to assess the value of, the mutations noticeable in the Jewish attitude to Jesus. Nor are we here concerned with the reasons which may have caused the change. Not even the most prejudiced observer of the contemporary scene would deny the fact of those changes. We do, however, hold that some intelligent interest ought to be taken in the change of climate that appears to have come about in the field of Jewish-

Christian relations by the pronouncements of distinguished Jews and by the active participation of renowned Jewish painters and sculptors in the execution of Christian art. We shall confine ourselves to the period of the last few years, thus eschewing any reference to Scholem Asch, John Cournos, Franz Werfel, Leopold Wertheimer (alias Constantin Brunner) and similar writers whose utterances are frequently quoted to support the theory of a radical transmutation in the Jewish attitude to Jesus. That does not mean to dispute the influence they have exercised upon their co-religionists. They may well have laid the foundations on which the change of climate became possible. But there are two reasons for omitting those men of literary fame: they belong to an older generation than the present one and could, by their very profession, never claim to speak for Judaism as such. This becomes evident when we remember that their writings led to a great deal of violent controversy in Jewish circles, were frequently denounced as incompatible with the tenets of Judaism, or at best tolerated as personal opinions expressed by individuals who had at any rate no official standing.

Our object is to look at some material gleaned from the contemporary Jewish scene, utterances of outstanding Jewish scholars, the work of celebrated Jewish artists, and try to discern a change of climate, proof of which might also be adduced from happenings among more ordinary members of the two communities.

Two more points will have to be borne in mind. First, it is only by remembering the past of Jewish-Christian relations, the active dislike (to put it mildly) of Jesus common to all Jews irrespective of their social or cultural status, their hatred of the meschummad (apostate), that we can appreciate the change of climate. There are striking differences in comparison with the years prior to the war, even in the manner in which the average Jew of to-day will speak about Jesus. And in the second place, we have no intention to minimise the discrepancy between the Jewish and the Christian conception of the Messiah, nor to conceal that, when it comes to the question of the Resurrection, we find that all Jewish authors and artists, with one exception, are unanimous in denying it.

The Jewish-Christian encounter can, by the very nature of the

two religions, only take the form of conflict or dialogue. In trying to redeem her past failure and sin, the Church has made, and is constantly making, some honest efforts to enter into a dialogue with the Synagogue and nobody can blame the Synagogue for being reticent about going all out to meet her opposite number whose past record would not dispel but rather foster apprehensions. Can it then be shown that there has been a diminution of tension and wariness on the part of the Synagogue that would entitle us to speak of a change of climate? The credibility of the answer will to a large extent depend on the calibre of the personages we can call to witness. A multitude of mediocre Jewish personalities may easily be found who at one time or other have publicly said nice and kind things about Christians and their Lord but it would mean next to nothing as they were in no position to speak on behalf of Judaism. They might, moreover, be people just on the fringe of the synagogue whose principles sit loosely on them. It is not sufficient to enumerate men who are Jews by name, born of Jewish parents and never contemplating baptism. What makes them important for our purpose is their belonging to the whole realm of Judaism, on which they must be recognised authorities. It means that we cannot here listen to the secularised, assimilated Jew who in his most understandable search after some antidote to modern materialism comes across Christian teaching but has never known Judaism at its best. He may be a Jew by name but in point of fact he is what the American Jewish author Lewis Browne has most succinctly described as a "non-Gentile of Jewish descent". What we require is the real Jew.

Dr. Sandmel, of Cincinnati, is looked upon as the greatest Jewish specialist on Christianity in the United States. He holds the dual position of provost and professor of Bible and Hellenistic literature at Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. In a lecture he delivered a short while ago he spoke of the tremendous change in the relationship between Jews and Christians, and of the growing Jewish interest in Jesus. "After almost two thousand years of antagonism and misunderstanding, the American scene has brought about the desire for understanding and co-operation. I do not know of any reversal of attitude in the

history of society as significant as this one.“ Even though Jewish scholars do not consider the Gospels as part of their Scriptures, they are now giving greater attention to them. There was, he observed, among Jews a higher “regard for the worth and value of the New Testament.” This, he added, “is not equivalent to an acceptance of its doctrines, but it has meant a changed attitude and a desire to understand the man, Jesus, in his Jewish setting.” Dr. Sandmel finally declared it “impossible for Jews to ignore Christianity.”

A colleague of his, Dr. Jacob Taubes, who occupies the chair of religion at the Columbia University and is the Professor of History at the Jewish Institute of Religion, gave recently a discourse on the Apostle Paul in the Congregation Habonim in New York. He stressed the Jewishness of Paul who the end of his life had adhered to the orthodox faith. The Rabbis had done an ill turn to Judaism by hushing up and suppressing any knowledge of Jesus and Paul for twenty centuries, said Dr. Taubes, and it was only now that Jews had begun to appreciate them. One of the most fascinating parts of his lecture dealt with Paul’s conversion. The crucifixion of Jesus must have appeared to Paul as the worst ignominy possible, and yet it was Jesus’ death on the Cross, meant to disprove and refute His Messiahship, which became to Paul the very proof of His being the Saviour. For Hellenism with its fear and perplexity was crying out for a redeemer who himself would have been humiliated and degraded. By proclaiming such a redeemer, Paul had introduced the greatest element of hope into a period of utter hopelessness. In spreading this type of Messianic message, Paul had shown his specific Jewishness and taught an idolatrous world something essentially Jewish.

It is by no means only in the atmosphere of America that statements like the above mentioned have been made by distinguished Jews. There are not many celebrities among the Jews of Britain who are regarded with deeper respect or warmer approbation than Dr. David Daube, of Oxford University, for quite apart from his distinctions in the field of jurisprudence, he is a lecturer in Talmudics and adviser to the Institute of Jewish Studies. When Dr. Jakob Jocz, the President of the International Hebrew Chris-

tian Alliance and thus recognised spokesman of the Christ-believing Jews, published his volume "The Jewish People and Jesus Christ" a few years ago, it was Dr. Daube who contributed the preface and thereby made history in a sphere that, in the past, had only been entered by Jews to hurl abuse at the apostates. He referred to the opinion, "expressed by great, enlightened Jewish scholars," that no real Jew could ever come genuinely to believe in Christ, and went on, "in the face of the present book, it is impossible to maintain this attitude. If we of the Jewish faith desire a discussion based on facts and not on prejudice, we must acknowledge the phenomenon of Jews accepting baptism from pure motives." No greater contrast to the past could possibly be imagined for here was a candid admission of an injustice that needed to be put right.

The world's leading Jewish newspaper, "The Jewish Chronicle," issued two years ago an official "Guide to Jewish Knowledge," compiled by a chief rabbi and an education officer, with a foreword written by Rabbi Dr. Isidore Epstein, the Principal of the Jews' College, London. In the section on history we find the following remarks on the rise of Christianity. "At this time the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth obtained a following among certain Jews, particularly in Galilee. Jesus did not teach the abrogation of the Torah and most of his teaching is good Jewish ethics. His disciples regarded him as the Messiah or King and he was accused to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, as being a menace to law and order. Jesus was crucified by the Romans but his teaching was spread by his followers." To estimate the tenor of this and similar writings by Jewish officials one has to recall the type of remark that almost invariably used to be added to any mention of Jesus in the past as for instance in the Jewish Encyclopaedia, published fifty years ago, "no Messiah that Jews could recognize could suffer such a death." It is not always what they say but what they leave out, omit to say, that marks the change of climate which has occurred.

Is it not conspicuous that a book "Jesus in the Background of History" from the pen of the Jewish master at the well-known Clifton College was recently published by Cohen & West and is being widely read and discussed among British Jews? The last

chapter is trying with amazing clarity to show that it is the personality of Jesus which still provides the ultimate impetus for the regenerative forces of the Christian faith. Another, rather unique feature of the book consists in notes, contributed by a Christian minister, on points where he as a Christian would disagree with the Jewish author. Fairness could hardly be stretched any further.

No modern painter has been hailed more enthusiastically by Jews than Marc Chagall. In fact, he has been accorded the epithet "the most Jewish artist of our time" and if background and characteristics are considered, the attribute seems fully justified. Coming of a family of poor people who looked upon the synagogue as the only source of knowledge and their only ideal, Marc Chagall never even sought to disavow his chassidic past. His mystical fantasy stems from the realm of Chassidism; the strange mixture of joy and sadness, of popular motifs and Jewish conceptions, so strikingly visible in his pictures, has introduced the world of Eastern Jewry to the West. Forty years ago he did the backdrops and scenarios for the Jewish Theatre in Moscow, to-day he is working on the stained glass windows of the Cathedral in Metz. In many of his paintings he has combined the Tables of the Law with the Man of Sorrows, nailed to the Cross, and Jesus is frequently seen in the company of rabbis or bearded Jews, terrified by the onslaught of persecution. There are scenes reminiscent of Ezekiel's words, "I sat there among the exiles," but instead of the prophet it is the Crucified One who is ever present where people, and especially His own brethren after the flesh, are being subjected to terror and slaughter. Is it, or is it not, surprising to find that Jewish viewers and critics are taking this combination for granted?

One might feel inclined to raise the question whether in the past any bishop or chapter of a cathedral would have ventured to ask a Jew to add beauty or lustre to a place of Christian worship. It could not have happened twenty or thirty years ago but even less feasible seems the idea of a Jew accepting such an offer and thus contributing to the adoration and homage paid to One who, according to Jewish tradition, was an impostor, a false messiah! To forget that means to shut one's eyes to the magnitude of the change.

“This is the greatest thing I have been asked to do, and I am sure it will result in a great act of faith.” Those were the words of Sir Jacob Epstein when the Bishop of Swansea and Brecon approached him with the request to sculpture the gigantic figure of Christ for the Anglican Cathedral at Llandaff, the national sanctuary of Wales. Sir Jacob who has been called the Rodin of our day, is generally acknowledged as the foremost sculptor in the Anglo-Saxon world and British Jews are quite proud of the fact that he prefers living in their country to returning to his birthplace, New York. His reputation both as a Jew and as a sculptor is such as to render it unnecessary to expatiate on the subject. When Epstein had completed his masterpiece, the Bishop said, “I venture to think that this Christ, a Christ of solemn majesty, compassionate and merciful, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, but Son of Man also and Son of God indeed, is Epstein’s greatest work.” It is quite intriguing that the only criticism has come from certain gentile circles with the question, “how can an artist who is not a Christian design works of art for Christian churches?,” but it has been brushed aside. When Epstein, who never before had made a figure of Christ, was interviewed he declared publicly; “Christ risen, supernatural, a portent for all time. The modern, living Christ, compassionate and accusing at the same time. The Jew, the Galilean, condemns our wars, and warns us that *Shalom, Shalom* must still be the watchword between man and man.” Here then the quest of the historical Jesus is left behind and the Risen Christ lifted up for all to see. And thousands of people continue to go to Llandaff and look at what has been called a wonder in our time.

The incorrigible will bear with us when we repeat the question, how could those things have happened twenty or thirty years ago? Nor are happenings like those reported above confined to the plane of famous personalities for they have their analogies in every day life. There is a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, doctor of theology and expert on the doctrine of original sin, married to a practising, unbaptised Jewess who has helped him to view many a problem through Jewish eyes, and thus enabled him to contribute amazingly much to the dialogue between Jews and Christians. Another Jewess, member of an old and faithful Jewish



family, married, without converting to Christianity, a pastor of the Swiss Reformed Church whose principal service lies in the field of the Christian approach to the Jews. In neither case have the Jewish families of the bride raised any objections to the choice of their daughters, nor has the relationship to the son-in-law become strained which would have been a matter of course in former times. As a corollary the case of Mr. Abraham Carmel ought to be mentioned, the first and only fully ordained Roman Catholic priest who became a Jew and lectures to Jewish audiences in Britain on the subject "Why I am a Jew."

It would be pernicious to exaggerate the importance of all that has been said. More evil than good would result from imagining that a change of heart is taking place in Jewish-Christian relations. Nor can that sort of transformation be expected by anyone who has even the most cursory knowledge of the agelong conflict between the Church and the Synagogue. We are only at the beginning of a new relationship and any future development will largely if not entirely depend on the humility and care with which both sides cultivate, and make use of, the new climate. In this connection we ought to take to heart what H. L. Ellison has said in a recently issued publication of Edinburgh House on "The Christian Approach to the Jew." Speaking of the Jewish attitude to Jesus, the author communicates what he knows from his own experience: "One can increasingly hear the Jew say, especially in Israel, 'He is one of us.' There are not a few who acknowledge that the Synagogue must learn from Him, but there are still few Christians willing to learn from the Synagogue."

The climate has changed and will, in turn, affect the air and the soil which will gradually enable new plants to grow, to blossom, to ripen and bear fruit.