

Bridging the Gulf

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BRIDGING THE GULF

By J. JOCZ, Toronto

A near tragedy occurred on a Canadian bridge March 20, 1962. A tractor-trailer truck with a load of 24 tons of steel bars was attempting to cross the Healey Falls bridge designed to carry a maximum weight of 8 tons. The obvious happened: as the truck was halfway, the middle span buckled — fortunately the driver was able to jump to safety before it was too late. This goes to show that there is a limit to the strain a bridge can take.

Constructing a bridge is even a more precarious business. We think of the tragedy connected with the Tay bridge at Dundee, in Scotland, on Sunday, December 28, 1879. While the usual mail train was crossing the bridge at 7.15 p. m., the central span suddenly collapsed opening a gap 3000 ft. long. About 70 to 80 people were drowned as the train plunged into the water. The fateful bridge was built by Sir Thomas Bouch and there is a moving novel about Sir Thomas's German son-in-law who was one of the chief engineers, under the telling title: *Berufstragik*.

A Board of Trade commission after investigating the cause of the disaster concluded "that the bridge had been badly designed, badly constructed and badly maintained". It is no small matter to be a bridge-builder.

In quite a different area, though no less perilous, bridging the gulf between the Jewish people and the Church, requires equal skill, resourcefulness and patience. Many attempts have been made on the part of men of good-will, but with little success. The difficulty of the task is the more complicated as on our side of the chasm the ground is too boggy for anchoring a bridge. We therefore admire Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher and his friends for their persistence and their courage.

When the first Yearbook, *The Bridge*, appeared in July 1955, it was hardly a bridge in the modern sense. For this it was too obviously an apologetic attempt trying to explain away the harsh and sometimes brutal facts of Christian-Jewish relationships. But

as the successive numbers appeared it increasingly departed from the traditional lines of apologetics and haughty superiority. *Bridge IV*, the latest number, is a sober, humble, down-to-earth example of scholarly endeavour¹.

The present *Bridge* calls a spade a spade, and whitewashes nothing. It is completely honest about Christian failure in the past. At the same time it does not pretend to be other than what it is — a Roman Catholic production concerned with the propagation of the Faith².

Father Oesterreicher is only too aware of the weakness of the foundations on his side of the Bridge. He knows, as we all do, that as long as the majority of Christian opinion remains hostile to the Jewish people, the bridge of good-will on the part of a few, hangs in the air. But it is not only a question of change of opinion: the past weighs heavily in the memory of Jews. The Church will have to do penance and make amends if Jews are to believe in a change of heart.

The Bridge therefore has the additional task, and by no means an easier one, to enlighten the Church and call it to repentance.

Bridge IV carries several documents directly addressed to Roman Catholics. Father Oesterreicher in his well-written Introduction points to the appeal made to the faithful on the part of the Roman bishops in Germany, May, 1961. It is a call to show “visible signs of expiation” and to “try everything possible to make amends for the injustice done to the Jewish people and to other peoples”. In this connection, Sunday, June 11, 61, was dedicated as a day of prayer and confession. The prayer prescribed by the bishops is given in full; here are a few sentences:

“We confess before thee: Countless men were murdered in our

¹ *The Bridge*, A Yearbook of Judaeo-Christian Studies, Vol. IV, ed. by John M. Oesterreicher, Pantheon Books, 1962.

² The non-Roman reader will be puzzled by such expressions as “apostolic celibacy” (p. 165), specially when he knows that except for Saul of Tarsus, the Apostles all were married men: this is certainly true of Simon Peter whose mother-in-law is mentioned in the Gospel (Mark 1,30), and who used to take his wife on mission journeys, as the other apostles did including the brothers of our Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 9.5).

midst because they belonged to the people from which comes the Messiah, according to the flesh.

We pray thee: Lead all those among us who became guilty through deed, omission, or silence that they may see their wrong and turn from it. Lead them so that they may examine themselves, be converted, and atone for their sins . . .”

Another document quoted in full is the pastoral letter by Cardinal Liénart, Bishop of Lille, addressed to the faithful in Lent, 1960. It pleads with Roman Catholics “to reject anti-Semitism absolutely, from the human as well as the religious point of view, and to adopt toward the Jewish people an attitude that is the very opposite of anti-Semitism, the attitude of respect and love” (p. 347).

For its central theme of the present volume the Editor has chosen love: “Love in the Old Testament and in the New, love in both the Christian and the Jewish traditions” (p. 16). Thus Kathryn Sullivan writes on: The God of Israel, the God of Love. She denies a dichotomy between the Old Covenant and the New — both contain the vision of God’s triumphant love: “so mighty is the love of Yahweh, so wise, so inscrutable that the sorrows of man, even his wickedness and mistakes, not to speak his virtues and joy, have eternal meaning in the mystery of this love” (p. 43). In a footnote the author points to a remark by John Furguson that *ahabah* in the Bible means election-love and includes both *hesed* and *zedek*.

Pursuing the same theme though in a different context, Mirjam Prager analyses the part Israel is assigned in the parables in the New Testament. This is an important subject, for it is frequently held that Israel plays a negative role as an obdurate and blind people. Mirjam Prager shows “that Jesus sought to stir his kinsmen with the same supreme irony” as the prophets did. “It was not the Master’s purpose “to turn his own kinsmen into obdurate men, without vision and without the life of grace”. She concludes in this well-written study that the parable proclaims a message of mercy “offering pardon to Israel and, through Israel, to all men” (p. 86, 88).

Barry Ulanow writes on The Song of Songs: the rhetoric of Love. His is a highly mystical approach and the writer shows the influence this erotic song has exerted upon the great mystics of the Church.

Joseph P. Brennan treats of Love of God in the Talmud. Here again amends are made for the casual treatment the Talmud received at the hands of Christian scholars in the past. It was almost a tradition to assert that the Synagogue only knows the Law while Christians know God as the God of love. Brennan quotes Rabbi Assi's dictum: "Charity is equal to all the other religious precepts combined" and assures his readers that "the Talmud does not lack positive expressions of the golden rule" (p. 137f). On the same line is the article by M. Raffaella de Sion: Bahya Ibn Pakuda, Tutor of Hearts. The author finds many aspects of the treatise by this medieval Jewish thinker and mystic of great appeal to a Roman Catholic. She approves the neo-Platonic philosophy, the importance it attaches to ascetism, and above all the mystical insights. Her paragraph: The pure love of God, discloses the ultimate secret of the Jewish saint: the love of God. Though Bahya looks upon Christianity as a heresy and rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, yet he does not hesitate to hail Jesus as a "saint". Raffaella de Sion knows how to appreciate the fine insights and the unusual spirituality of this Jewish teacher.

The other material contained in *The Bridge* is of no less importance.

The article by Paul van K. Thomson: The Tragedy of the Spanish Inquisition, is a superb piece of honest writing. The Church has used every possible device to exonerate the Inquisition from a deliberate attempt to persecute Jews. Thompson forthrightly admits: "no legal subtlety can lessen the dread of the historic record" (p. 188). It is however to be admitted that the Inquisition had political overtones peculiar to Spain which rendered the papacy almost powerless and which prompted Pope Pius V to pray that God may deliver the Church from the tyranny of the Spanish Crown.

In view of the frankness with which the author approaches this painful subject, his half-hearted attempt to exonerate the Church at least to some extent, comes as a surprise. "Dogmatic intolerance", because the Church knows herself to be "the divinely empowered teacher of moral and religious truths", when it expresses itself in burning of "heretics" of the Church's own making, is an odd excuse (cf. p. 193), to say the least!

The present writer was in the Synagogue audience at Frankfurt/M, early 1933, when Franz Werfel delivered his paper: *Können wir ohne Gottesglauben leben?*³ Ever since, Franz Werfel has constituted both a challenge and a puzzle to him, specially in respect of his relation to Christ and the Church. He has read a number of papers dealing with the subject, but he thinks that Frederick C. Ellert's article: Franz Werfel's Great Dilemma, is one of the best. It is both erudite and penetrating. Not least important is the Editor's addendum: Franz Werfel evaded commitment by hiding behind "thought, poetry and theological speculation" (p. 225). His letter to Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel of New Orleans, Oct 27, 1942, while moving, is theologically indefensible though it evinces sympathy:

"Israel is going through the hour of its most inexorable persecution. I could not bring myself to sneak out of the ranks of the persecuted in this hour . . ." Here Werfel felt as did Henry Bergson, that it was the wrong time to leave his people. But he adds: "As long as there are anti-Semitic Christians . . . the converted Jew must feel embarrassed by the impression of cutting a not altogether pleasant figure" (p. 216). This reminds one immediately of his hero Engländer in the novel *Barbara* whose attitude to Christ and the Church is determined by fear of public opinion. Werfel was obviously unwilling to become a fool for Christ's sake.

Another article deserving special mention is Franz Wasner's The Popes' veneration of the Torah. It deals with the ancient custom which required of the Jewish community in Rome to meet the newly elected pope and to present him with the Scrolls of the Law. The pope was to take the Law, pay homage to it and return it to the Jews with the words: "The holy Law, you Hebrew men, we praise and venerate . . . But your observance and unavailing interpretation of the Law we reject . . ." (p. 275). According to a medieval authority, Cencius (later Pope Honorius III, 1216—27), the Jews were awarded for taking part in the procession on Easter Monday as were the other *scholae* with twenty solidi from the pope's treasury. On the other hand, at the pope's coronation, they were

³ Cf. Franz Werfel, *Zwischen Oben und Unten*, Stockholm, 1946.

expected to bring to the treasury 3½ pounds of pepper and 2½ pounds of cinnamon.

Wasner explains: "By putting the scroll on his shoulder, the pope may have wished to show that the Church identifies herself with the Torah as much as the Synagogue does, though for the Church it is prophet of and tutor to Christ" (p. 282).

The relationship between the papacy and the Jewish community makes fascinating reading and reveals features which are usually overlooked.

Again the Editor's *addendum* to the article provides a few facts from contemporary history which deserve to be remembered: during the Fascist persecution thousands of Jewish refugees found shelter in the Vatican City; 15,000 were sheltered at Castel Gandolfo; when the Nazis forbade ritual slaughter, the pope invited *shohetim* to perform the rite within the walls of the Vatican; when the Germans demanded 100 pounds of gold from Roman Jewry, Pope Pius XII, ordered religious vessels to be melted down, and within one day provided the required amount.

These are important facts which provide the very fabric of which bridges are built in human relationships. Wasner's casual remark: "If the history of the Middle Ages teaches one lesson, it is that the Kingdom of God cannot be established by legislation" (p. 289), is perhaps of equal importance, if we could only learn it.

The discussion sponsored by the *Christlichjüdische Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Schweiz* in the spring of 1958, in which a Protestant, a Roman Catholic and a Jew met for a theological conversation at Basel, is described by Herbert Haag: *Three Voices at Basel*. The agreed subject was Salvation present and future according to Jewish and Christian tradition. Involved in this subject is the problem of history, and the divergence between Christian and Jewish thinking will come as a surprise to many theologians. It reveals once again how Judaism has become alienated from basic biblical categories. The Christian view of history moves towards a goal; for Judaism history is circular: "not even the messianic days will bring history to its conclusion" (p. 352).

It is not possible to do justice to all the contributors to this unusually rich and varied work, but one article must not be left

unmentioned: The Face of Pasternak by Cornelia and Irving Süssman.

This gifted couple has made a contribution to each number of *The Bridge* and the present writer found them always original and exciting. The short article on Pasternak allows a glimpse into the soul and mind of an unusually sensitive and upright man whose destiny it was to carry the burden of the prophet. Pasternak's poem "In the Lord's keeping" is singularly moving in view of *Zhivago's* end.

The bridge-builders have done good work in preparing the ground. There is still much to be done. As to the other side of the gulf, there is hardly a stir. Jewry is too occupied with world problems to take much notice. *The Bridge* is almost never mentioned in Jewish publications. This is a mistake. Perhaps it is time for the Editor to allow a Jewish voice to be heard in his Yearbook? So far it has remained a monologue, deep calling unto deep . . .

DIE JUDENFRAGE IM SPIEGEL DER DEUTSCHSPRACHIGEN LITERATUR DER JAHRE 1959—1961

VON GERH. JASPER, Pastor, Bethel bei Bielefeld

Einleitung

Im Jahre 1960 dieser Zeitschrift kam die deutschsprachliche Literatur zur Judenfrage, die in den Jahren 1950—1958 erschienen war, zur Sprache. Der Leser wird sich dessen erinnern, welch ein ernstes inneres Fragen sowohl im Judentum wie auch in kirchlichen Kreisen und darüber hinaus in diesen Büchern zum Ausdruck kam. Man kann sagen: die beiden Hauptereignisse für das jüdische Volk, die Gründung des Staates Israel und das furchtbare Geschehen der Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich, führten zu einer inneren Neubesinnung im Judentum und vor allem auch zu einer neuen Begegnung zwischen Kirche und Judentum in Deutschland, wie sie in dieser Intensität kaum bei anderen Völkern wahrzunehmen ist.

Die letzten drei Jahre 1959—1961 lassen uns aus der deutschsprach-