

Jew and Gentile: Some Considerations Suggested by Dr. Hay's Reply

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I AM very grateful to the *Journal* for offering me the opportunity of clarifying my point of view on the significance of Israel. I argued in my former article (Vol. III, No. 1) that even after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the election of the Jews was not nullified, although certainly it was greatly qualified; that, notwithstanding their disobedience, God still gave them a special place in His great design for the world; and that this brought with it certain far-reaching implications for the Church. This view was challenged by Dr. Hay in his reply to my article (Vol. III, No. 2). The salient point of his argument was that the Jews are no longer set apart from other people. For only those Jews who have accepted Christ as their Saviour are the true Israel which is elected, together with those of the Gentiles who recognize Christ, while those Jews who have not accepted Him are rejected by God. That is to say, since the resurrection there has ceased to be any difference between Jew and Gentile and consequently there can be no mystery about Israel today.

I am indeed very grateful to Dr. Hay for his reply, for it is a testimony to the fact that he too recognizes the importance of this question, which has come increasingly to occupy the thinking of the churches on the European continent since the last war and which has already had repercussions in the World Council. The closely knit argumentation of Dr. Hay's article will certainly compel its readers to consider more thoroughly the problem we are dealing with. I am even more grateful for the fact that Dr. Hay argues fully and entirely on a scriptural basis. For this theological question can be very easily confused with quite alien political questions about the national state of Israel and with pro- or anti-Semitic sympathies, and become thereby unwarrantably emotional. With Dr. Hay, I too am convinced that Zionists, Dispensationalists and British Israelites (*bien étonnés de se trouver ensemble*, I am sure) cannot base their position on the Bible.

But the very fact that Dr. Hay argues on a biblical basis and that therefore our difference of opinion arises from differences in exegesis of the biblical data makes it difficult for me to answer him. Dr. Hay will agree with me, I am sure, that a theological position cannot be proved by quoting a few or even many proof-texts. The verses quoted in a theological argument express most succinctly a thought found in a whole passage or whole epistle or, if it be a fundamental concept, in the whole Bible. A careful listening to tone and colour is necessary, a tuning-in on the thoughts expressed by the biblical words but really lying behind them. In a serious

argument in which both sides try to take their stand on scripture, no absolute proof can be advanced that one exegesis is right and the other wrong. We cannot convince each other—though by pointing out to each other certain, perhaps neglected, aspects, by directing each other to inconsistencies, and by asking each other how we can fit particular verses into a certain view, we can make each other more attentive and more careful in listening to scripture and each other, so that scripture may break through our preconceived ideas. But ultimately only the text itself—or rather the Holy Spirit through the text—can give the feeling of evidentness which makes us say: *scriptum est*.

It therefore does not seem to me that it would be very fruitful to answer Dr. Hay by following him point for point in every verse he quotes and putting my different exegesis against the one he offers. I have decided rather to reply in a more thetical than apologetical form. I shall centre my whole argument on one point, which seems to me to be the main one on which all our other differences are focused, namely, that there is still a certain “otherness” of Israel from the world. The significance and consequences of this “otherness” I elaborated in my former article. If this method seems not to answer some arguments brought forward by Dr. Hay, I can assure him that I have considered all the verses he quoted as carefully as I could, trying to see them as he did. But I continue to hear the whole of the New Testament, and more specifically Paul, giving a different message in regard to Israel, not only in explicit words, which sometimes admit two or more interpretations, but also in the *imponderabilia* which are indispensable for any expression of thought, often difficult to pin down, but therefore not less real.

As a starting-point in our consideration I take Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This verse is always brought forward in the discussion and must certainly be taken into careful consideration. For in view of this Pauline utterance is it not a foregone conclusion that in Jesus Christ Jew and Gentile are now the same, that the original difference is annulled, that therefore we cannot speak of a mystery of Israel—and certainly not of a mystery of disobedient Israel—and that there is no longer any question of a special election of Israel, other than the loving will of God, “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2.3)? But Paul can not have meant in this verse an extinction of all differences, for in the same verse he goes on to say that there is neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. No Christian will maintain that Christ has extinguished the difference between man and woman. Not only in society but also in the Church man remains man, woman woman. In regard to salvation, both are equal, both have direct access to God, and both are full members of Christ’s Body. But their polarity still exists, not as something to be done away with, but as something to be accepted gratefully at the hand of the Creator. It is true that in Christ the

relation between the two sexes is qualified and changed, but the change means a new evaluation, not a devaluation. It is generally conceded today that only in this differentiation of men and women is the richness of humanness to be found and the possibility of human encounter given. And while there is admittedly no biblical indication which allows us to interpret positively the difference between slave and free, it is evident that Paul had no intention of rejecting it either. After Christ this difference too remained and was not abolished even among Christians, although in Christ there could be no separation and no hostility among men. These parallels make it impossible to draw the conclusion that Jews and Gentiles are no longer different. At least, we can not base such a conclusion on this text and texts like it.

That the differences are fully accepted by Paul is corroborated by the fact that in his epistles he addresses each of the before-mentioned groups separately and gives each some specific advice. In regard to men and women, slave and free, this remark does not need elaboration. The fact is well known and the passages are unambiguous (cf. Col. 3:18ff.). As for the Jews and Gentiles, Paul addresses them separately not merely in a few passages but in nearly all his epistles, dealing with their particular problems in specific ways. If one disregards this fact, one precludes the understanding of Paul's thought. For his argumentation is polemical, and to take his remarks thetically is to introduce a subtle but very real distortion.

In this light we have to attend to utterances of Paul that seem at first sight to be opposed to the view that there is still a real difference between Jews and Gentiles. Several times we find statements that there is no longer any distinction (Rom. 3:22; 10:12; Col. 3:11). The meaning of these statements becomes clear, however, when we realize their scope. Let us consider especially the Epistle to the Romans. We have to realize that chapters 9-11 are not an isolated digression but that the whole Epistle deals with the problem of the relation of "Jew" and "Greek." True, this relation is dealt with in the light of the Gospel, but this relation is the problem that is dealt with (cf. 1:16). In the first part of the Epistle Paul speaks as a Jew to his fellow-Jews about their relation in the light of their Messiah to non-Jews; in the second part (9-11) the reverse question is central: the relation of non-Jews, the "Gentiles," the "Greeks," to his own people Israel—to the whole of Israel, both in so far as it has and has not accepted Christ. I believe it was Abelard who wrote that the Epistle to the Romans has as its central theme the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles.

Addressing the Jews in the first part of the letter, Paul argues against their conception of election. In order to magnify God's free election of Israel he has to fight their distortion of it into a human prerogative. *Corruptio optimi pessimum*. For the Jews forget that election means being chosen as an instrument which God can use for His work and that it is something to be humbly and thankfully accepted. They change it into an "electedness" in which they can trust, so as to consider themselves above the nations. Fighting this self-assurance and conceit, Paul tells them that they are in no way better than

the Gentiles and that, just because God revealed His will to them in the first place and gave them His law, they are under a greater obligation than anyone else to follow Him (2:9). Being a Jew is only of value if God's will is fulfilled, otherwise it is just something external and physical. The Jews therefore have no reason to consider themselves better or more beloved than the Gentiles just because they are Jews. Paul here stands in the line of the Old Testament prophets, who spoke out of their solidarity with their people about God's punishment and judgment in order to bring them to a right understanding of what it meant to be God's chosen people.

As a non-Jew one has to be very careful in quoting these Pauline words. There is a vast difference if they are said polemically from a basis of love and solidarity, or rhetorically as an objective statement of fact. Since the former is the case, it is not allowable to draw the conclusion from Romans 2-4 that belonging to Israel was unimportant to Paul. The point can perhaps best be understood if we transfer Paul's words to a more familiar situation and apply them to the Church. (The close parallel between Israel and Church is certainly here significant!) For the same complacency as was found in Israel appears at times in the Church. One can imagine a pastor saying to his flock: "Those are not Christians who are baptized and belong to the Church, but only those who are spiritually Christians. Yes, Jews or Mohammedans who do God's will might be just as good or even better Christians than those who confess that they believe in Christ." But it is clear that these words can only rightfully be spoken by one in the Church to those who are in the Church. As a statement that it makes no difference whether one is a Christian or not, they are to be rejected.

To the Gentile Christians Paul speaks in a quite different way. For if he has to fight the self-assurance of the Jews who trust in their "electedness" he has also to fight the temptation of the Gentiles to doubt the election of Israel when they see its disobedience (9-11). Different as the words may be, their concern is the same—a real understanding of what election is. The Jews falsify it by making it a human possession; the Gentile Christians minimize it by thinking too little of the grace and love of God which can not be annulled and are stronger than man's unbelief and disobedience. Against the doubt of the Gentiles, he emphatically says: "God has not rejected His people" (11:2). And then he points to himself as a living proof of this truth.¹ This pointing to himself makes sense only if he takes himself not as an exception—for in that case the question of 11:1a would still not be answered—but as an individual who is representative of his people. Therefore he strongly emphasizes the fact that he himself is a Jew, a descendant of Abraham (and only "fleshly" descent can be meant), a member of the tribe of Benjamin. We meet here a fundamental biblical notion, the notion of representation. For Israel in her election is representative of the election of all nations, as some groups or individuals in the history of Israel, for instance, the seven thousand who remained faithful in Elijah's time, repre-

1. Note here the *gar*, which is suppressed without reason in the R.S.V.

sent the whole of Israel, and as finally Christ represents all mankind. As Karl Barth says in his *Church Dogmatics*: "The elect in Israel affirm the election of Israel itself."² Paul and the mere handful of Jews who had accepted Christ are not exceptions to a general rejection: they are the living signs of God's design and final destination of Israel.

While on the one hand Paul warns the Gentiles not to doubt God's faithfulness to his chosen people, even if temporarily they are disobedient and rejected, at the same time he resists all attempts they may make of Judaizing. This question was also one that concerned both Jews and Gentiles in the Church in a different way. That the Jews remained Jews when becoming Christians was a matter of course to Paul and the early Church.³ The question was whether the Gentiles, when becoming Christians, had to become Jews too (vide Acts 15). Paul's own attitude in this respect is significant, for while he had Timothy circumcized, who as son of a Jewish mother was by Jewish law considered to be a Jew (Acts 16:3), he objected to the circumcision of the Gentile Titus (Gal. 2:3).⁴ His strong resistance to the Galatians who wanted to adopt circumcision and the Jewish law is also to be noted. Perhaps one may surmise that the Gentile converts had a kind of inferiority complex, fostered by the attitude of Jewish Christians (cf. Gal. 2:12). One gets that impression when listening to Paul arguing that they are no longer farther away from God than the Jews, that they are now full participants with the Jews in God's grace in Jesus Christ. Originally they were without God, being aliens from the commonwealth (*politeia*) of Israel, but now that they have become fellow-citizens they should not consider themselves only second-class members of the Church (Eph. 6:16).

That had to be said to the Gentiles in Paul's time. But today the situation is changed. It is no longer the Gentile Christians who feel inferior. Perhaps today one has to say to them: "Though you are full participants in God's election, you are nevertheless the ones who came later, who contrary to nature have been grafted in the cultivated olive tree, who have been added to the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).⁵

This is the exegetical foundation on which my understanding of the mystery of Israel is based—or rather which is preliminary to this understanding—for without it there is no mystery at all, in the Pauline sense of the word. The difference between Israel and the Gentiles remains, though in Christ both are made one and the dividing wall of hostility has been broken

2. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Vol. II, 2; p. 299.

3. In the time of Justin Martyr there were still Jewish Christians who wanted to observe the law. According to Justin, if they were willing to remain in communion with other Christians and did not compel them to keep the law, and as long as they believed in Jesus Christ and His eternal kingdom, they were to be considered Christians.

4. The translation in the R.S.V. of the participle *ōn* by "though he was a Greek" is not a very happy one. It should rather be translated: "because he was a Greek."

5. Because of the word *kai*, wrongly left out in the R.S.V., it is impossible to equate "all who walk by this rule" with "the Israel of God." Careful linguistic investigation shows that it is impossible in the Pauline use of the word to translate *kai* with an explanatory *namely*. The "Israel of God" indicates a second group not identical with the first, namely that part of the people of Israel which had accepted Christ.

down. Therefore although the Christian Church is the elected instrument of God to bring the world, Jew and Gentile, into His obedience, there is also a special election and a special promise even for hardened Israel,⁶ according to a truth that is not to be forgotten, that election is not primarily election to believe, with its counterpart rejection in unbelief, but election to be specially used by God in his saving design for mankind and to be in a special way representative of others. God has for all men only one purpose, namely that of bringing them to Christ and of establishing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. For this one purpose He uses the Church of Jews and Gentiles, who gratefully accept this purpose, and Israel which does not yet accept it and is hardened.

6. It is to be noted that in Rom. 11:28 the very same Jews who are enemies of God because they did not listen to the Gospel are also beloved when it is a question of election. Of course one can maintain that Paul is here carried away by his nationalism. One can also say with C. H. Dodd in his commentary on Romans: "From our standpoint, with a far longer historical retrospect than Paul could have dreamt of the special importance here assigned to the Jews and their conversion in the forecast of the destiny of mankind is artificial." But that Paul still calls the disobedient Jews Israel—a term that regularly carries the connotation of "chosen people" with it (vide *Theologisches Woerterbuch* of G. Kittel)—and that in Rom. 9–11 he assigns some special eschatological importance to Israel seem to me to be facts that can not well be denied. They have been maintained by Augustine, Thomas, and the majority of present-day exegetes. Lagrange calls it the "exégèse normale."