

The mystery of the world, Israel and the Church in the vision of Jacques Maritain

Dan Đaković*

dan_djakovic@ffrz.unizg.hr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2196-8163>

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It seems that man cannot observe the world without some lenses or some prism. That is why the author in this article tries to construct a three-sided worldview prism that includes three secrets or mysteries – the mystery of the world, the mystery of Israel and the mystery of the Church – in accordance with the vision of the great French philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882 – 1973). The term »mystery« here means something that transcends, attracts and warms the reason and, if humble, makes it more fruitful, but which the reason cannot comprehend. So, mystery is not against but above and in favor of reason, and it differs from a problem in that it is in principle unknowable or unsolvable within the horizon of human reason. Jacques Maritain was born into a liberal Protestant family, he had great sympathy for the Chosen People and was the husband of a Russian Jewess with whom he was baptized in the Catholic Church (1906), which represents a relatively rare and very interesting phenomenon. In addition, Maritain played a significant role in clarifying the problem of the relationship between the Church and the Jews in the 20th century, mostly in understanding the compatibility of their supernatural missions, which goes beyond the mere political level, why he still represents a guiding star when it comes to Jewish-Christian dialogue, to which this paper also aims to make a small contribution.

Key words: Church, Israel, Jacques Maritain, mystery, world.

* Dan Đaković, PhD, Research Assistant, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia.

Introduction

It is not possible for a man to live without some worldview. At the same time, there can be no view of the world without some prism or some lens through which to look. Each such view includes some interpretation. We live in a time of, at least proclaimed worldview pluralism. No one has a monopoly on the worldview and interpretation of the world. In this sense, the pluralism of the viewpoints and interpretations is (and always was) simply a fact. We deal with this fact in different manners. Some tolerate it more easily or even joyfully, some with difficulty and aversion. Although I think and believe that the truth is one, objective, absolute and universal, I am more inclined to the first group that rejoices in the pluralism of perspectives and views, and through this article I am just trying to construct a worldview prism using the passages of the famous French philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882 – 1973). It is a three-sided prism that offers a specific and differentiated perspective on the world, Israel and the Church. The premise is that the relationship between the Church and Israel goes through the world and the history, and the world needs both – Israel and the Church, and all these realities contain something not immediately apparent, something secretive or even mysterious, mystical. It is something that often eludes our reason, which nonetheless cannot abandon the attempt to grasp the truth (i.e. reality) in its entirety.¹

Jacques Maritain was one of the greatest, or at least one of the most prolific, philosophers of Thomism and personalism in the last century. He was highly influential in academia, politics, diplomacy and global integration after World War II. At the invitation of Charles de Gaulle, he served as the French ambassador to the Holy See immediately after the war. He was the principal philosophical architect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. His thoughts also significantly influenced the Church, especially during the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965). His ideas are evident in several key documents from the Council, such as *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Nostra Aetate* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* as well as in the important encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) by Pope Paul VI, who even called himself Maritain's disciple.²

¹ By the term *mystery* here I mean something that transcends, attracts and warms the reason and (if humble) makes it more fruitful, but which the reason cannot comprehend. A *mystery* differs from a *problem* because the problem is in principle solvable, while the mystery is not (the distinction which Gabriel Marcel used). I explored this topic in my doctoral dissertation, from which I am sharing and adapting some excerpts here. See: Dan ĐAKOVIĆ, *Politics and Religion in the Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, 2021.

² See: Gennaro Giuseppe CURCIO, Roberto PAPINI (ed.), *Jacques Maritain e il Concilio Vaticano II*, Studium, 2016.

Maritain was born in 1882 into a liberal Protestant family in Paris. He studied philosophy and natural sciences at the Sorbonne. During his student years, he and his colleague and fiancée, Raïssa Oumansoff (1883 – 1960), a Jewish philosopher and poet from Russia, experienced the bitterness of despair and the meaninglessness of life. After that they experienced a spiritual conversion through an encounter with Christ and were baptized into the Catholic Church. Both of their families viewed this baptism as a tragedy. But for Jacques and Raïssa building bridges between these worlds became a crucial part of their life mission. This paper wants to stay on that line and support those bridges.

1. *The Mystery of the World*

The world, according to Maritain, in its own way, is both a seducer and a tempter, and it seems to conceal a certain mystery within it. Understanding Maritain's philosophy requires first shedding light on his views regarding the relationship between the world, the Church, and the Kingdom of God.³ Maritain believed that the most challenging issue for (Christian) philosophy of history⁴ is the relationship between God's (uncreated) freedom and human (created) freedom in shaping the world and history. Additionally, Maritain starts from the premise that God is innocent and cannot be the cause of moral evil. This evil originates in humans and their free rejection of good, which is essentially self-destruction. For without God, man *can do nothing* (see John 15:5).

Maritain warns that this can be understood in two distinct ways. If referring to the order of good, it implies that without God, man is incapable of achieving anything with appearance of being or good. Alternatively, if referring to the order of evil, it means that without God, man can only do *nothing*, which is essentially nothingness, the annihilation of Being and oneself. The impulse of good always originates from God, while in the realm of evil, characterized by unwillingness or annihilation (the introduction of nothingness into

³ Cf. Jacques MARITAIN, *Integral Humanism. Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a new Christendom*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973, 99-102. While the Church and the Kingdom of God are not synonymous, Maritain cautions against overemphasizing their difference. The Church is the Kingdom of God already begun on earth – God's Kingdom in its pilgrim, militant, and crucified state. When he talks about the Church, Maritain regularly means the Catholic Church, but also more widely than that, the Mystical Body of Christ, which, at least potentially, has the same scope as the world. See also: Jacques MARITAIN, *The Peasant of the Garonne. An Old Layman Questions Himself About the Present Time*, Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1968, 28-35.

⁴ The philosophy of history traditionally refers to a distinct philosophical discipline that seeks to understand the essence and meaning of history. It is sometimes also called the metaphysics of history. In more recent times, the philosophy of history involves examining the values, limits, and scope of historical knowledge. The first significant example of the philosophy of history can be found in Saint Augustine's capital work *De civitate Dei*, where he attempts to provide a philosophical and theological interpretation of the sequence and flow of events in time.

God's movement), the initial impulse always arises from the created being. The drama of history unfolds from the intersection and clash, from the pursuit and conflict between uncreated freedom and created freedom. The magnificence and beauty of God's freedom lie in its capacity to render its creation even more splendid by allowing other freedoms to diminish it, for from the abundance of destruction paradoxically emerges an abundance of being.⁵

Christian doctrine concerning the world and the temporal human community, as Maritain underscores, asserts their simultaneous belonging to the human, divine, and diabolical realms. Indeed, the world serves as a battleground owned by three entities. It belongs to God by the virtue of creation, to the devil or the *prince of this world* by the claim of conquest – owing to sin, and to Christ by the triumph He achieved through His Passion over sin, the world, and its *prince*.⁶ However, it's crucial to grasp what is being meant by the term *world*. In a broader context, according to Maritain, the world encompasses all created entities or anything that isn't divine. In a narrower sense, it denotes our tangible, observable universe. Furthermore, it encompasses our human and moral universe, the cosmos of humanity, culture, and history, in their development on Earth, with all their intricately intertwined relationships and tensions. This perception of the world aligns with the natural order, and Maritain emphasizes that terms like cosmos, *mundus*, or world aptly capture this essence. Within this material realm, humanity stands as a rational, spiritual and free agent, distinct from God.⁷

It is evident to all of us that good and evil are intertwined in the world. Good and evil always grow together like wheat and weeds (see Matt. 13:24-30).⁸ Natural good and supernatural good are also mixed, and Christ takes both to His heart. Similarly, natural evil and supernatural evil are also intermingled, while the fallen angel is fighting for both. In a certain sense, he is the ruler or *the prince of this world*. Nevertheless, the world cannot escape the rule of God as the supreme governor.⁹ Both Christ and the devil are fighting for the world, and Christ recaptures the world from the devil – unfortunately, not without losses and victims (see Matt. 13:37-39). Maritain points to numerous passages in the New Testament that mention the world and compares them.¹⁰ These pas-

⁵ Cf. Jacques MARITAIN, *On the Philosophy of History*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957, 67-71.

⁶ Cf. Maritain, *Integral Humanism...*, 108-109.

⁷ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 71.

⁸ If they grow (!) together, we can assume that the amount of good and the amount of evil in the world are always similar! A large amount of evil indicates a large amount of good and vice versa. This is important to keep in mind especially when evil seems to have prevailed. But also, when it seems to be the opposite, in order to maintain vigilance, for every generation has its own enemies of freedom, truth and goodness.

⁹ The term *prince* is used specifically because it denotes a lower rank compared to a king.

¹⁰ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 74-76.

sages speak of the world in completely opposite and seemingly contradictory ways, thereby enhancing the sense of enigma and mystery.¹¹

Maritain categorizes the first group of texts under the title *The World as Antagonist*, which primarily means that the world is distinct from God, possessing its own ways and its own relationship with God, and participating in the realization of the eternal plan.¹² Christ was sent to it: »As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world« (John 17:18; see also John 11:27 and 1 John 4:9). »Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me... Then I said – Here I am – It is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, my God« (Heb. 10:5-7). And to that which is not God, both God and Christ must be revealed: »Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me« (John 17:23). »But he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me« (John 14:31).

In the same category, Maritain places those verses where the world appears as an antagonist in the strict sense of the word – as an enemy and persecutor, as one who rejects and even hates the gift from God: »The world did not recognize him« (John 1:10). »The world cannot hate you, but it hates me« (John 7:7). »If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you« (John 15:18-19). »The world has hated them, for they are not of the world as I am not of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world« (John 17:14-16).¹³

In this perspective, the Church, like Christ, originates from God, not from the world. In this regard, individuals must choose whether they align themselves with the values of the world or with those of God. »You adulterous people, don't you realize that friendship with the world means hostility toward God?« (James 4:4). »Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away« (1 John 2:15-17). »Through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world« (Gal. 6:14). Moreover, the world is under the sway of evil: »The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one« (1 John 5:19). »Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble« (Matt. 18:7). »The prince of this world now stands condemned« (John 16:11). And the world will face judgment: »So

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.* See also: Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne...*, 35-37.

¹² Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 75.

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 76.

that we will not be condemned along with the world« (1 Cor. 11:32). Nevertheless, Christ has triumphed over the world: »In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world« (John 16:33).¹⁴

In the second category of verses, Maritain gathers those that can be placed under the title *The World as Redeemed and Reconciled*. »For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son« (John 3:16). God decided, through His Son, to save the very world that, according to St. Paul, will be condemned (1 Cor. 11:32): »For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him« (John 3:17). »For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world« (John 12:47). »Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world« (John 1:29). Thus, Christ takes upon Himself the sins of the very world for which He does not pray. He accepted that sins be committed against Him (2 Cor. 5:21) and died to liberate the world from sin.¹⁵

Maritain warns that the world cannot remain indifferent (except superficially, pretending to be indifferent) towards the Kingdom of God. It either longs for it, thus reviving itself, or opposes it, leading to its own demise. In essence, the world's stance towards the realm of grace is either one of unity and inclusion or one of separation, conflict, and death. If the world's relationship with the Kingdom of God is characterized by separation and conflict, then we have the world as an antagonist and enemy of the Kingdom – a world steeped in evil, a world for which Christ does not pray, a world that »cannot receive the Spirit of truth« (John 14:17), and thus all those passages gathered under the first heading come into play. Suppose the world's relationship with the Kingdom of God is unity and inclusion, then we have a world that has embraced the Kingdom, a world that God loved so much that He sacrificed His only Son, a world whose sins were borne by the Lamb of God, and for whose salvation the Church applies the love and sufferings of Christ *hic et nunc*, while history unfolds, drawing strength from the Redeemer's blood. In this case, all the passages gathered under the second heading come into play.

In this manner, Maritain reconciles the apparent contradiction between these two sets of texts. There are, in fact, two simultaneous types of relationships between the world and the Kingdom. If the world detaches itself from the Kingdom of God and follows the path of disobedience, embracing the *prince of this world*, the first set of texts applies, containing warnings and pejorative remarks concerning the world ultimately condemned. Conversely, if the world is imbued with the life-giving influences of the enveloping Kingdom, then the texts pertaining to the salvation of the world come into play. The world is saved for eternal life, but only when taken together with the Kingdom and within it. However, its ultimate state of supernatural salvation will manifest itself beyond time and history – beyond the present world, beyond this world (*hic mundus*),

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid*, 76-77.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid*, 77.

on a new earth and under new heavens that will be united with the Kingdom of God in its triumph and glory. Maritain asserts that since *the history of the Church is the history of truth*,¹⁶ it moves towards the ultimate manifestation of the Kingdom of God - beyond world and history – having no other purpose than precisely that Kingdom, if it is fully revealed.¹⁷

2. *The Mystery of Israel*¹⁸

There is no doubt that the Jewish people hold a unique status or play a distinct role in the history of the world. Even those who believe that the entire Bible or the entire corpus of holy Jewish texts is mere fiction or nonsense cannot deny that it is precisely this *fiction and nonsense* that has bestowed upon the Jews a very specific place and plight in the drama of human kind and history. While other nations have their own sacred texts, beliefs, myths and legends, it seems that none of these have granted any other people such a unique status or such a particular history interwoven with miraculous events, trials, sufferings and triumphs. The drama, suffering, endurance, success and indestructible hope of Israel cannot be rationally understood or explained. Therefore, the special position of the Jews among all the nations of the world is taken here as an obvious fact, regardless of its various interpretations.

Maritain distinguishes between two levels of this question. The first is theological in nature and concerns the fate of the Jewish people in relation to the Kingdom of God and the order of eternal salvation. The second level is more philosophical than theological and pertains to the destiny of the Jewish people in relation to the secular history of the world, prior to its ultimate acceptance.¹⁹

Maritain has written on this issue in multiple instances, always seeking the contribution that philosophy can make to the truth about it.²⁰ He wrote the essay on Israel in France in 1937, at a time when, although certain racist publications had already disgraced the French press, any anti-Jewish legislation

¹⁶ In fact, he quotes the famous thought of Blaise Pascal.

¹⁷ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 77-78.

¹⁸ The essay on Israel under this title was published in the book: Jacques MARITAIN, *Ransoming the Time*, New York, Scribners, 1941, 141-176, but it was originally written in 1937.

¹⁹ See: Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 48-53.

²⁰ For example, Maritain's study *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question*, New York, Longmans, was published in 1939. It addressed the persecutions suffered by Jews in some countries at that time and contained material that was historically complementary to the philosophical considerations presented in the essay *The Mystery of Israel*. These are deep philosophical, theological and historical questions that deeply affected Maritain personally, as his wife Raissa was Jewish, and his heart always beat in solidarity with the Chosen People. See also: Robert ROYAL (ed.), *Jacques Maritain and the Jews*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, 286.

in France seemed entirely impossible.²¹ At that time, the vast majority of the French people were repelled by anti-Semitic trends. It was still possible then to consider the Jewish problem in a purely philosophical, objective, and detached manner, but just a few years later, Maritain admits that he doesn't know if he could do so in the same way:

»I do not know whether, in the face of the anti-Semitic nightmare spreading like a mental epidemic even among some groups of democratic people, it is fitting to speak of such questions except to utter our indignation at the iniquity and spiritual wretchedness now assaulting minds and nations«.²²

Considering that he wrote his essay during a less ominous period, he believed that its publication in 1941 could still be appropriate if its content contained something healing. He never wanted to despair over the reason and the healing power of its cold endeavor to understand. Maritain hoped that some readers, who, albeit in good faith, were more or less influenced by anti-Semitic slogans, would still be able to recognize that this issue does not depend on rumors, anecdotal observations, philosophies from gaming rooms, old prejudices, or spontaneous temperamental feelings, but on the key principles governing human history and Christian conscience.²³

Moreover, it's crucial to underscore that the independence of judgment in his essay, regarding the nuances of Jewish behavior and psychology, *presupposes his deepest respect and affection for the Jewish people* (!), and should be seen as a necessary precondition for delving into issues addressed *among the mature*, as Saint Paul says (1 Cor. 2:6), and within the realm of profound insights offered by Christian wisdom. Maritain's perspective transcends mere psychology, sociology, politics or ethics; it is primarily metaphysical and religious in nature! He doesn't seek to characterize the empirical aspects of specific events, but rather to unveil their hidden and sacred significance. What he tried to explain has meaning only if it is taken in its holistic unity.²⁴

Simultaneously, especially with regard to his Jewish readers, Maritain explains that as a Christian, he can only try to understand the history of their people from a Christian viewpoint. He felt hurt when, upon the publication of his essay in France, some individuals, driven by prejudice, attempted to discern hidden proselytizing²⁵ motives where only a quest for truth guided his mind.

²¹ Maritain indeed contends that the antisemitic decrees and regulations issued later were a betrayal of the true French spirit, essentially imposed by the Vichy government on a defeated nation under German pressure. See: Richard Francis CRANE, Jacques Maritain, the Mystery of Israel, and the Holocaust, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 95 (2009) 1, 25-56.

²² Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 141. This is frighteningly similar to some of the trends in the West today.

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, 142.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁵ Proselytism is a term carrying a negative connotation, denoting more or less intrusive efforts to recruit individuals to one's religion, worldview or ideology, often without due respect for

Others misconstrued as personal reproaches what was simply an observation about the consequences of the drama of Calvary concerning Israel's relation to the world. They were misled, and Maritain was aware that embracing the complete Christian perspective was a prerequisite for endorsing the assertions made in his essay. It would be unrealistic, he believed, to expect any concurrence from a reader who does not adopt that perspective. He wasn't attempting to convince²⁶ such a reader, but with the goal of mutual understanding (which is already significant), he thought that everyone might find it intriguing to learn how a Christian philosopher grapples with this issue.²⁷

Maritain highlights the intriguing discovery that the most impactful Christian expressions about the spiritual nature of anti-Semitism were found in a book by the Jewish author Maurice Samuel.²⁸ Maritain has found Samuel surprisingly unaware of their profound Christian implications, thus increasing the significance of his testimony. Maritain suggests that prophetic insights often shine brightest when conveyed by slumbering or stubborn prophets, who perceive their message only in an obscure way.²⁹

»We shall never understand – says Samuel – the maniacal, world-wide seizure of anti-Semitism unless we transpose the terms. It is of Christ that the Nazi-Fascists are afraid; it is in His omnipotence that they believe; it is Him that they are determined madly to obliterate. But the names of Christ and Christianity is too overwhelming, and the habit of submission to them is too deeply ingrained after centuries and centuries of teaching. Therefore, they must, I repeat, make their assault on those who were responsible for the birth and spread of Christianity. They must spit on the Jews as the Christ-killers because they long to spit on the Jews as the Christ-givers.«³⁰

Maritain, however, warns that the simple fact that someone does not feel sympathy for Jews or is more sensitive to their faults than their virtues does not automatically constitute anti-Semitism. This applies equally to all nations

their freedom, conscience and common sense. See: Martine-Thérèse ANDREVON, *Le mystère d'Israël dans l'œuvre de Jacques Maritain, Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 101 (2013) 1, 211-231.

²⁶ It's worth noting, especially in the context of the topic of this paper, that the Latin word *convincere*, from which word *convince* in English derive, actually means *to win together*. Therefore, to convince someone doesn't mean to conquer them, but rather to win (reach the truth) *with* them.

²⁷ Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 143. Generally speaking, people often think they disagree on certain matters without realizing that they never understood each other in the first place, which then becomes the source of many unnecessary conflicts and divisions. Philosophy, as the discipline that defines, distinguishes and clarifies concepts, plays a very important social role in this regard, never imposing (as ideologies do), but merely offering its views, ideas, distinctions and definitions.

²⁸ Maurice SAMUEL, *The Great Hatred*, New York, 1940.

²⁹ Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 144.

³⁰ *Ibid.* The term »Nazi-Fascists« can be substituted with any other label that signifies an anti-Semitic group, whether from historical contexts or today!

or races. According to Maritain, anti-Semitism is the fear, scorn and hatred of the Jewish race or people, along with the desire to subject them to discriminative measures. There are many forms and degrees of anti-Semitism. Apart from some fanatical forms, it can take the form of supercilious nationalist and aristocratic bias of pride and prejudices; or mere desire to eliminate competitors; or a routine of vanity fair; or even an innocent verbal mania. Yet, no one is innocent in reality, says Maritain. In everyone lies hidden seeds, more or less inert or active, of the spiritual disease that erupts worldwide in a homicidal and myth-making phobia, whose secret soul is resentment against God and the Gospel – its name is *Christophobia*.³¹

If we want to study the origins and modalities of anti-Semitism, it is essential, says Maritain, to consider the overall issue of the dispersal or diaspora of Israel.³² Then we can observe that, despite the economic, political and cultural dimensions that this problem superficially assumes, it is and remains also a mystery of a sacred nature. Its main elements, as outlined by Saint Paul in his Letter to the Romans, remain intertwined.³³

Maritain first points out that Jews are not a race in the pure biological sense of the term. In the current state of the world, no pure races exist among human groups large enough to matter. Jews are no exception; the intermingling of blood and ethnic blending have been as significant for them throughout history as for other groups. In the ethico-historical sense, where race primarily denotes a community of spiritual and moral patterns, inherited experiences, memories, and aspirations – and where hereditary tendencies, blood type, and somatic type play a more or less important role, but only as a material foundation – Jews are indeed a race. Just as the Iberians or Bretons are. But they are also much more than this.³⁴

According to Maritain, Jews are not a nation if that term implies a historical community of people bound by common origin or birth (a race or a group of historically related races, in the ethico-historical sense of race) who collectively engage in or seek to engage in political life. Yiddish has not the characteristics of a national language. It can be considered a national language in a different sense, similar to Ladino, serving as an identifier of Jewish nationality in several countries. Yiddish developed in southern and central Germany in the 12th century. It is a language of suffering, misery, and dispersion – *a dialect of the Holy City*, fragmented and scattered among, and often oppressed by, other nations. A small number of Jews (500,000 in 1940), gathered in Palestine, con-

³¹ Cf. *ibid*, 145.

³² The term »diaspora« (Greek: διασπορά) implies scattering or sowing seeds, which aptly describes the fate of the Jews as those who have been dispersed among the nations of the world.

³³ See Rom. 9-11. These are key chapters for understanding this issue. Namely, the main idea i.e. belief is that God's promises are made forever. *His gifts and His call are irrevocable!* (see Rom. 11:29).

³⁴ Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 147.

stitute a nation, and Hebrew is their national language. They are a special and separate group, highlighting the fact that other Jews (then about 16 millions in the world) are not a nation.³⁵

The Jews of Palestine are not merely a nation; they were striving to become and they became a state.³⁶ However, the great mass of Israel still obeys a different law. It does not tend to establish a temporal society. Due to their deep vocation and by its very essence, Israel is disinclined – at least until their mysterious historical mission is fully realized – to become a nation, and even more, to become a state. The harsh law of exile, of the Galuth (Diaspora), prevents Israel from aspiring toward a common political life.³⁷

If the word *people* simply refers to a group gathered in a specific geographic area and inhabiting that land, then the Jews are not a people. If *people* is synonymous with *nation* they are not a people. If it is synonymous with race (in the ethico-historical sense), they are a people – and more than a people, as Maritain said. If it denotes a historical community characterized not by the fact (or desire) of leading a political life, like a nation, but by being nourished by the same *spiritual and moral tradition and of responding to the same vocation*, they are a people – the people of peoples, the people of God. They are a consecrated tribe; they are a *house, the house of Israel*. Race, People, Tribe – all these words, if they are to designate the Jews, must be made sacred.³⁸

Therefore, Maritain simply concludes – Israel is a mystery! Of the same order as the mystery of the world or the mystery of the Church. Just like them, it lies at the heart of the Redemption. The philosophy of history, aware of theology,³⁹ might strive to reach some understanding of this mystery, but the mystery ultimately transcends such comprehension in every aspect! Our concepts and awareness may engage with these things, yet they fall short of fully circumscribe them. Maritain, following the path of Saint Paul, contends that we must consider the Jewish problem as an *issue without a solution* – that is, until the great reintegration foreseen by the Apostle, which will be like a »resurrection from the dead« (Rom. 11:15). According to Maritain, striving to

³⁵ Cf. *ibid*, 148.

³⁶ The concept of a state is understood as a complete and self-sufficient political entity.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid*. Maritain wrote these words before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In some later works, he reflected on the origin, purpose and future of the state of Israel, but that is not the topic of my current discussion. It is enough and very important to note here that this is not to question the state of Israel, but to say that the State itself does not solve the mystery of Israel. Even after the establishment of the state, Israel remains a mystery! See also: Robert A. VENTRESCA, Jacques Maritain and the Jewish Question: Theology, Identity and Politics, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 2 (2007) 2, 58-69.

³⁸ Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 149.

³⁹ This entails not ignoring but rather considering theological assertions, facts or truths, not subjecting to them like a servant but critically and dialogically examining them like a collaborator. Taking theological data into account for philosopher doesn't imply believing them *a priori*.

find in the pure, simple, decisive sense of the word, a *solution* of the problem of Israel, signifies an attempt to stop the movement of history.⁴⁰

Every solution to a practical problem implies an end to tension and conflict, an end to contradictions, peace itself. Asserting that there is no solution to the problem of Israel means ensuring the perpetuation of struggle. Maritain identifies two methods for this: the animalistic method, which is one of violence and hatred, a war that is open or covert, prudent or furious, a war of flesh aimed at the extermination, the riddance, or the enslavement of Jews, a war of the *world*, a war of *homo animalis* against Israel. This represents the anti-Semitic method. The genuine Christian method, however, consists in entering through compassion into the sufferings of the Messiah's agony and through the intelligence of charity into a spiritual struggle for human redemption. It's the struggle of the Church and of the *homo spiritualis* for the salvation of the world and the salvation of Israel. This path, Catholic and Pauline in essence, requires our participation at the temporal level in the constant work of concrete intelligence, which neither conclusively resolves nor overcomes antinomies, but at each moment in history discovers whatever is needed to make them more bearable and more supple.⁴¹

Maritain also highlights the remarkable lack of foundation in anti-Semitic propaganda. Those who perceive a vast conspiracy orchestrated by Israel to enslave all nations or to morally corrupt and politically subvert the entire Christian world,⁴² or who believe that the world will flourish once it has rid itself of that race or people – such men, as Maritain argues, seem to prove that it is impossible to hate the Jewish people and at the same time remain an intelligent being.⁴³

Maritain said that Christians can be anti-Semitic only when led by the spirit of the world (and its *prince*), and not by the spirit of Christianity. It's difficult to imagine a more egregious offense than to harbor hatred or disdain for the people from whom their God and His Immaculate Mother originated. That is why the bitter zeal of anti-Semitism always at the end turns into a bitter zeal against Christianity. Hatred for Jews and hatred for Christians ultimately come from the same source!⁴⁴ Maritain invokes the words of his spiritual mentor and godfather, poet Léon Bloy, who questions Christians on how they would feel if people around them constantly spoke with the utmost contempt or sarcasm about their father or mother, intending to cause harm. This is precisely what happens to Jesus Christ.

⁴⁰ Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 149.

⁴¹ Cf. *ibid*, 150.

⁴² This primarily refers to the book *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, but also some other texts.

⁴³ Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 150.

⁴⁴ It is so even today, I think, and it will be so tomorrow, even if Christians and Jews are not aware of it.

Bloy reminds Christians who forget or refuse to acknowledge that their God-Man is a true Jew, in nature the Jew of Jews, *the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David* (Rev. 5:5), *who himself confirmed that salvation comes from the Jews* (John 4:22), that His Mother is a Jewess – the most beautiful flower of the Jewish race that Saint Joseph and all the apostles were Jews, as well as all the Prophets, and finally, that the entire Christian Liturgy is drawn from Jewish tradition and books. Christians are spiritually Semits. Hence, Christian anti-Semitism is the most horrible slap in the face suffered in the ever-continuing Passion of our Lord. It burns the most and is unforgivable because the Lord suffers it on His Mother's Face, and at the hands of Christians.⁴⁵

3. *The Mystery of the Church*

The Church, by its very nature, is the object of theological faith and belongs to the realm of realities hidden within the divine life, revealed to us through divine revelation as supernatural mysteries. Consequently, there's inevitably a certain misunderstanding between believers who contemplate the Church through religious lenses and non-believers who perceive it solely through human terms.⁴⁶ For believers, it is understood that the Church is inspired by Christ's life filled with grace, a life that is accepted by weak human beings who depart from that life whenever they sin. Thus, they recognize the Church as sinless despite comprising fallible members. In contrast, non-believers often attribute all the faults of its members to the Church, failing to grasp that even on a natural level, a nation, for instance, possesses its own life that, though entirely human, transcends the discouraging mediocrity of many of its constituents.⁴⁷

According to Maritain, believers who possess the highest and most authentic understanding of the transcendent essence of the Church and its inner sanctity – visibly manifested in its saints and in all the fruits that spring forth from it – are the most called upon to confront the sins of its members and the ways in which Christians, as Berdyaev puts it, betray Christianity through their behavior at one level or another. By preaching the Gospel to the nations and standing against worldly powers in defense of spiritual freedom, the Church has, over the course of two millennia of history, taught people about freedom.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 173-175.

⁴⁶ In a political, sociological or ethical way.

⁴⁷ Cf. Jacques MARITAIN, *Man and the State*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951, 185-186.

⁴⁸ Even from a phenomenological point of view, Bible, Israel, Christianity and the Church are the strongest liberating and anti-totalitarian forces in history. It is reasonable to expect the same in the future.

Blinded forces that have been assaulting the Church in the name of freedom and the deification of human personality for over two centuries now finally discard their mask, Maritain reflects. They reveal their true nature. They yearn to subjugate humanity. Today's era, however dismal it may seem, has something to inspire those who love the Church and cherish freedom. The historical situation we face is finally clear. The great drama of our time is the conflict between man and the totalitarian State,⁴⁹ which is nothing but the old false deity embodied in the emperor or the Empire, seeking unconditional worship for itself, devoid of law. Freedom and the Church are aligned in the defense of man and humanity.⁵⁰

A person is called to be a part of two universes simultaneously. The Church is a supernatural realm in both theological and entirely realistic terms. It is Christ's mystical body, a realm distinct from the world yet in mutual relationship with it, the Kingdom of God in a journeying and crucified state. A person can belong to the Church in several different senses. According to Maritain, who also references Charles Journet, all people, in one way or another, belong to the Church or can be considered redeemed by the Church – redeemed in hope...

There are visible members of the Church who belong to it by faith, through baptism, and by freely accepting the authority of Christ's vicar. If these members are not spiritually deadened due to mortal sin, love and suffering in Christ's grace enable them to actively participate in the very work of Redemption, considering their sacramental union with Christ. On the other hand, there are those who invisibly belong to the Church. They clearly lack that complete faith in God, who rewards those who seek Him, as well as internal grace and mercy. Finally, there are those who potentially belong to the Church. They lack even initial faith but can receive grace and thus participate in the life of the Church. Maritain supports this by invoking Thomas Aquinas's thought that those who do not believe, if they do not currently belong to the Church, still belong to it potentially. This possibility is based primarily on Christ's power, which is sufficient to save the entire human race, and then on free will (*Sum. theol.*, IIIa, q. 8, a. 4, ad 1).⁵¹

In this regard, Maritain asserts that the Church, understood as the Mystical Body of Christ, potentially encompasses the same expanse as the world itself. It is a realm sustained by grace and mercy, with Christ as its sovereign. Its essence is supernaturally oriented, directed towards God and participation in divine life. Evil has no foothold within it, and the devil holds no sway. Thus, the Church is conceived as unblemished and pure.⁵² The Kingdom of God casts no

⁴⁹ It can be the national state of the 20th century or some supranational technocratic state of the 21st century.

⁵⁰ Cf. Maritain, *Man and the State...*, 187.

⁵¹ See: Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 71-72.

⁵² Cf. Maritain, *Integral humanism...*, 41-43 and Maritain, *Man and the State...*, 186-187.

shadow; it is a sanctuary of holiness, contrasting with the impurity of the world where evil thrives and the devil exercises influence. The Kingdom of God represents a supernatural good, embodying mercy⁵³ – a form of goodness attainable to humanity through the power of God's grace. This mercy transcends any evil humanity may harbor, rooted in the eternal love by which God eternally loves both Himself and the human race.⁵⁴

The world, as an order of nature, is inherently linked to the Kingdom of God. Consequently, it is determined not only for its own natural purposes but also, through the Church, for the supreme purpose of the supernatural order – the Kingdom of God. Additionally, the world is exalted within its own realm. Its natural purpose, with its triple character,⁵⁵ is elevated by its connection to the supernatural purpose and virtues. Due to the effect of grace, which complements the world, although allowing us to transcend it, nature is elevated within its order. For instance, the common worldly good of a political body will be elevated within Christian society. Brotherly Christian love will play a role in civic life itself, extending beyond the mutual relationships among the holy in the Kingdom of God. Hence, it abounds and enlivens civic friendship.⁵⁶

The world is not in a state of pure nature, but in a state of vital and organic connection with the Kingdom of God. Therefore, for Maritain, the actual natural purpose of the world is indeed a sublime natural purpose.⁵⁷ However, according to Maritain, it is always important to emphasize that the natural purpose of the world, although not the ultimate purpose, is a completely real purpose, and never merely a means. This is of paramount importance for the philosophy of history or culture in general. It means that worldly things are not mere means to achieve a supernatural purpose. They are, of course, destined for that purpose, but not as mere means. Although they are intermediate and less valuable purposes, worldly things themselves have value and intrinsic

⁵³ Mercy (charity) is, according to Maritain, *secret weapon of Christianity* (see: Maritain, *On the Philosophy of history...*, 84). It is, in my view, one of the most beautiful thoughts of his entire oeuvre.

⁵⁴ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 73.

⁵⁵ It is about the rule of man over nature, i.e. the achievement of human autonomy, then about the improvement of the human being in the field of spirit – cognition, art and morality, and finally about the manifestation of all the possibilities of human nature in the field of matter and body. The world therefore has a threefold purpose, but there is progress both in the direction of good and in the direction of evil.

⁵⁶ See: Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 73.

⁵⁷ Similarly, according to Maritain, philosophy is elevated by its vital connections with theology, from which it nevertheless greatly differs. Maritain places special emphasis on this elevation within the natural order itself. If this elevation were not recognized, there would be a danger of separating grace from nature, leading to a form of naturalism where nature runs its course entirely separate from any connection with grace (see: *ibid*).

goodness, so they are worthy of pursuit for their own sake, even though they are also means in relation to the supernatural purpose.⁵⁸

The common good of civil life serves as the ultimate goal - not the absolute ultimate goal, but rather the relative ultimate goal within a specific context. Similarly, the natural purpose of the world, with its threefold character, represents the ultimate relative goal, the ultimate goal within the realm of nature, while only the supernatural purpose stands as the ultimate absolute goal. Maritain finds it deeply problematic when the existence of purpose or natural purposes of the world goes unrecognized, even though they constitute lower and less esteemed ends.⁵⁹

The history of the Church, as we have previously mentioned, is a history of truth moving towards the ultimate revelation of the Kingdom of God, which exists beyond history and has no higher purpose than this fully realized Kingdom. In one sense, this Kingdom is already present in the form of the Church, the mystical body of Christ. However, in another sense, the Kingdom of God is yet to come.⁶⁰

The Jews have awaited (and are still awaiting) this Kingdom in time. For Christians, it will be realized beyond time. This is the eternal Kingdom that will be established in the land of the resurrected. Although this idea pertains to a kingdom, a political community with God as its king, and thus differs from the Church, the concept of the Kingdom of God is eschatological, relating to the end of times. Nevertheless, what is to come after time is being prepared within time. It is the ultimate goal for which the course of history is a preparation and into which it ultimately flows.⁶¹

On the one hand, the history of the Church and the spiritual realm is directed towards this Kingdom, while on the other hand, the history of the secular world and the political community also converge towards it. However, Maritain emphasizes a crucial distinction. The history of the Church already represents, within the bounds of time, the beginning of the narrative of that Kingdom, which will find its ultimate revelation at the end of time. In contrast, the history of the world will only reach its ultimate destination through a profound transformation, symbolically depicted as the fiery purification of the

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 73-74. Here, it is important to note a certain difference between typical Christian and Jewish perspectives. The latter places a greater emphasis on the value and goodness of the world and on *earthly hope* (this especially includes justice here on earth) which should be distinguished from *eschatological hope*. In this sense, the Jews would be more the guardians of the earthly hope, and the Christians of the eschatological hope. This influence profoundly engaged Maritain in his pursuit of justice and solutions that transform secular society in accordance with the demands of the Gospel. The autonomy and value of the created world was also an important topic at the Second Vatican Council, for sure not without Maritain's influence.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 74. This may even be the central principle of his political philosophy.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.* See also: Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne...*, 32-33.

⁶¹ Cf. Maritain, *Integral humanism...*, 101-102.

world, culminating in the establishment of the Kingdom. This transformative process will be preceded, within the course of time, by the reconciliation of the Church and the Synagogue,⁶² as highlighted in the recurring law cited by Saint Paul, for *God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all* (see Rom. 11:30-32).⁶³

Throughout history, the impact of Christ's mystical body tends to be more significant during periods when Christian-influenced civilization is flourishing. Maritain suggests that if the full teachings of revealed truth, the sacraments, and spiritual guidance were effectively communicated to pure souls, the influence of Christ's mystical body on the world would be profound. However, there are times when secular society, particularly in areas where religious divisions have led to spiritual decline, becomes more receptive to the influence of the Mystical Body. In such cases, divine energy encounters fewer obstacles in its impact on secular society, as there is less resistance from both inactive Christians and non-believers.⁶⁴

Hence, it is possible that at a given moment, cultural areas where Christian-inspired civilization hopes to find more fertile ground for its future development may actually be the same areas where the impulses of Christ's mystical body towards secular life are primarily carried out by people of goodwill who invisibly belong to it, while their visible forces play a limited role in the overall inspiration.⁶⁵ According to Maritain, this is the case with America (US) in our epoch.⁶⁶ The Catholic Church in American life is gaining increasing influence and paving the way for the rest of the Christian world. Therefore, American Catholics⁶⁷ are called to a particularly important historical role if they fully grasp their mission, especially the intellectual (and political) aspect, by collaborating in the journey of the national community as a whole.⁶⁸

Maritain reminds us that it's clear that America, due to its roots and spiritual outlook of the *Founding Fathers*, as well as the moral structure of its secular authority, aligns more with Protestantism than Catholicism.⁶⁹ Marit-

⁶² Cf. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time...*, 169.

⁶³ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 84-85.

⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 89-90. See also: Jacques MARITAIN, *On the Church of Christ: The Person of the Church and Her Personnel*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1973.

⁶⁵ This also pertains to the growing number of individuals from various Christian or Jewish denominations who, despite being born into these communities, feel liberated from the sins of division or heresy due to their goodwill and the passage of time, so they do not perceive obstacles to cooperation (see: Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 33).

⁶⁶ This applied to America in the middle of the 20th century, but it is possible to see today that Maritain's insights had a very prophetic dimension with regard to the 21st century.

⁶⁷ Today, this applies especially to the laity!

⁶⁸ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 90-91.

⁶⁹ During his stay in America, Maritain considerably softened his attitudes towards Protestantism, as we can read them from his work *Three Reformers* where he was rather merciless towards Luther, which can also be interpreted by the fact that he was brought up in the spirit of liberal Protestantism, which was *de facto* practical atheism, which is why he didn't really have the

ain suggests that the American religious tradition is increasingly recognizable as a triple tradition: Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. Consequently, America today stands out as a part of the national heritage, embodying the concept of a Christian-inspired civilization more than any other place on Earth, despite facing strong opposing forces and currents. If there is hope for the sprouting of a new Christendom in the modern world, then America may provide the historical and ethical-social soil suitable for such growth. However, this presupposes overcoming opposing currents towards secularism, whether in the form of complete separation of national life from religion and the Church or in the form of a flourishing religion that is subservient to politics and national progress.⁷⁰ Additionally, it requires overcoming those who advocate for anti-liberal conformism or for utopian technocracy.⁷¹

Conclusion

Jacques Maritain believed that in the Christian perspective, precisely because the fullness of the God's Kingdom comes after the end of history, the world's journey towards the Kingdom and its progress towards its natural purposes⁷² will continually arise and persist as long as history endures. In this, Maritain exposes the contradiction within Hegel's and Marxist philosophies of history. Unlike Christian philosophy of history, which asserts that the end lies beyond time, these dialectical or positivist, as well as immanentist or atheistic, philosophies insist that emergence is the only reality and that the process of change continues endlessly. Yet, they present themselves as if they are the ultimate and final discovery, or even the judgment at the end of time and history.

Christian philosophy of history, particularly when considering the mystery of the world, of Israel and of the Church in history, does not contain contradiction because it affirms that the end is beyond time. Therefore, the movement of history can never, within time, reach a final and ultimate state or a final and ultimate self-disclosure. A Christian philosopher of history accepts a mystery that does not submit to reason and, as Maritain warns, never puts himself like God at the end of time, as Hegel, Marx or Comte did.⁷³ Christians can never

opportunity to get to know his own heritage in the right way, which on the spiritual plane always represents a kind of, bigger or smaller, spiritual and moral wound that can hurt a lot, and man is not responsible for it (see: Jacques MARITAIN, *Three Reformers. Luther – Descartes – Rousseau*, Port Washington, N.Y., Kennikat Press, 1970, 6-53).

⁷⁰ See: Maritain, *Man and the State...*, 173-178.

⁷¹ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 91. It's remarkable how relevant Maritain's thoughts remain in our time, especially when we observe events in the United States either in relation to politics or the Church.

⁷² Unfortunately, it is also simultaneously its progression towards evil.

⁷³ Cf. Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History...*, 53-54, 91.

reach their final goal nor rest in this world and time.⁷⁴ Likewise, they cannot make a final judgment about that same world and time. Still, as long as the world exists, Christians must always seek new advancements and improvements, more justice and friendship on earth (together with Jews and all men of good will), and a more complete realization of the Gospel.

It is never enough. There will always be an imperative to do more – *semper magis*, as the Jesuits would say. In the context of this paper, that specifically means more listening, more dialogue, more prayer, more research, more learning, more humility, more good will, more good deeds and more gestures of reconciliation. Despite the fact that Christians, each in their personal life, must constantly strive for the eternal salvation of their soul and body, they must, over the centuries, strive to better serve the realization of justice in this world and to serve the realization of *earthly hope* in the Gospel. Salvation beyond time, from the perspective of Christianity, is not only impossible to separate from this earthly task but is conditioned by it in a certain way. This is precisely what the famous Gospel text about the righteous and the cursed (the criterion for salvation) speaks about – everything done to the least is done to God (see Matt. 25:31-46).

⁷⁴ Following the example of their Teacher who has *nowhere to lay his head* (Matt. 8:20).

Dan Đaković*

Misterij svijeta, Izraela i Crkve u viziji Jacquesa Maritaina

Sažetak

Čini se da ljudi ne mogu promatrati svijet bez nekih leća ili neke prizme. Zato autor u ovom članku pokušava konstruirati trostranu svjetonazorsku prizmu koja uključuje tri tajne odnosno misterija – misterij svijeta, Izraela i Crkve – sukladno viziji francuskog filozofa Jacquesa Maritaina (1882 – 1973). Pod pojmom *misterij/otajstvo* ovdje se misli na nešto što nadilazi, privlači i grije razum te ga čini plodnijim ako ostane ponizan i prihvati njegovu nespoznatljivost. Misterij nije protiv, nego iznad razuma, a razlikuje se od *problema* po tome što je načelno nespoznatljiv ili nerazrješiv unutar horizonta razuma. Jacques Maritain je rođen u liberalnoj protestantskoj obitelji, bio je velik zaljubljenik u Izabrani narod i suprug ruske Židovke s kojom je primio krštenje u Katoličkoj crkvi 1906. godine, čime predstavljaju relativno rijedak i vrlo zanimljiv fenomen. Maritain je k tome imao značajnu ulogu i u bistrenju pogleda na problem odnosa Crkve i Židova u 20. stoljeću, ponajviše u shvaćanju kompatibilnosti njihovih nadnaravnih misija, što nadilazi puku sociološku i političku razinu, zbog čega i danas predstavlja zvijezdu vodilju kad se radi o židovsko-kršćanskom dijalogu, a čemu i ovaj članak želi dati skromni doprinos.

Ključne riječi: Crkva, Izrael, Jacques Maritain, misterij, svijet.

* Dr. sc. Dan Đaković, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Fakultet filozofije i religijskih znanosti, Jordanovac 110, HR-10000 Zagreb; e-mail: dan_djakovic@ffrz.unizg.hr.