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Is contact with Hebrew Christians more likely to convince the enquiring Jew than sermons from the missionary?

A Jewish Problem

By H. L. Ellison.

IN the last few years the whole position with regard to the baptism of Jews has changed. Over a large area of Europe many Churches either definitely refuse to baptize Jews, or evade the question by sending the enquirer to the nearest missionary, on the plea that he is a specialist. As a result, an increasing number of stations are reporting such a rush of enquirers that all the workers' time is being taken up with baptismal instruction. Many have hailed this with delight; others, including the present writer, ask themselves whether there are not grave dangers involved.

There can be no doubt that the baptism of those who have never experienced anything of the power of Christ has always been a hindrance to the presentation of the Gospel, and Jews are always inclined to accuse true converts of unworthy motives. As far as the writer's own experience goes, it seems that those baptized without a Christian experience very seldom obtain it later. More than that: their children quickly realize the emptiness and falseness of their parents' religious profession and normally grow up with an antipathy to all faith. Under modern conditions, it must be considered very doubtful whether the baptism of the parents really does win the children for Christianity.

It would seem, too, that the whole system of giving baptismal instruction, as it is generally understood in Jewish missionary work, creates a completely wrong impression for the average Jew. Baptismal instruction should be the giving of the final intellectual instruction to one who already has the heart experience; in actual fact, it normally is an attempt to turn a non-Christian into a Christian. As a result, the Jew almost inevitably obtains the impression that the chief requisite for baptism is an intellectual one, and with the best will in the world it is often impossible to remove it.

The setting of baptism as the goal of the instruction, and the fixing of a definite time, make it often very difficult to refuse the rite when the time is up, although one may have an uneasy feeling that all is not as it should be. This is all the more the case, as the missionary is not likely to have any intimate knowledge of the man's private life. Even when the Holy Spirit has given him the spirit of insight, it is all too easy to make a mistake.

I myself have not had to deal with any very great number of persons seeking baptism, but my experience has been interesting. Once I had made it clear that I was not giving baptismal instruction, that is, that I was willing to give instruction in the

Christian faith for a minimum period of six months, but there was not even an implied promise of baptism at the end of it, most went elsewhere. An uncompromising beginning with the third chapter of St. John's Gospel and the implications of the Sermon on the Mount quickly got rid of all but two. One of these, a young woman engaged to a nominal Christian, ceased to come after three months, when she saw that she was no nearer a promise of baptism. The last, a student of music, came to me regularly for nearly *eighteen months* before he was converted. He later thanked me almost with tears that I had all along refused to baptize him.

This last case is particularly instructive. Not only did he come to me for nearly three times the generally accepted time, but there can be no doubt that the average Christian worker would have been willing to baptize him long before his conversion. It was only some strange insight that kept me from the step. All others whom I have baptized came to a heart experience first, and only thought of baptism afterwards. Surely this should be the normal way.

The problem really goes much deeper than the question whether a certain missionary method is advisable or not. More than half of the world's Jews are living in a nightmare. If they have not yet fallen victims to German anti-Semitism, they know that the day of doom has only been postponed a little, and they have no real hope

of final escape. Where is it to end?

So the thoughts and hopes of millions of people are increasingly turning to emigration, but when they realize that in six years only a part of the Jews of Germany were able to get out, they feel that their hope is indeed slender. Many will turn to the Churches for baptism, hoping against hope that their Christianity may mitigate their persecutors' fury, or open some door in a strange land. Surely missions should be clear in their mind as to the answer to the question "Shall we baptize them?" the more so as the Churches will increasingly tend to turn to them for advice and help in this matter.

Many have hailed the present distress as indeed the Church's great opportunity; is it? It is true that there are many Jews to-day "without God and without hope in the world" who are turning, as a last hope, from a long-since discredited Judaism to Christianity, and thank God, not a few of them have found Jesus Christ. But what shall we say of the rest? Is there anyone more hopeless to preach to than the man who wants to be a Christian at any cost, simply in the hope of saving his skin. Such a man will do anything, agree to anything. How is the missionary to test him, specially if he has not one, but fifty or a hundred such cases on his hands?

The answer given to this question will depend much on one's

general theological outlook, but it does seem to me that the New Testament indicates the truest line of approach. For certain very good reasons Jewish missions have always tended to lack local Church backing; they have seldom been Church founders and builders (I speak of living Churches, not of bricks and mortar).

There can be little doubt that if the enquirer could be brought into real contact with a living community, of Hebrew-Christians or others, he would learn the true nature of Christianity much quicker than from the sermons and instruction of the missionary. What is still more important, the missionary would no longer be forced to decide whether he should baptize, or not. It would now depend on the recommendation of the community. Among all the obvious benefits of such a system perhaps the greatest would be that the enquirer would learn that there are Christians and not only "missionaries" who love the Jews.

There is nothing startling about such a suggestion on paper, but anyone with a nearer knowledge of the religious and missionary conditions of Central and Eastern Europe will at once see very great difficulties. There are centres where there is no possible community present, but in most cases the communities would have to be trained to understand the Jew and make him welcome—yet another task for the overworked missionary!

Often, however, the greatest problem is the missionary and the mission. All too often the available community belongs to some other denomination. It is essential that the missionary and the community be separate entities. It is not very important whether the community exercises a certain amount of control over the missionary, or not, that will depend on circumstances; but it is most important that the missionary should not exercise too much control over the community. It is just on this point that most experiments along this line have broken down; the community has simply been an appendix, not an integral part of the mission, and without any organic life of its own.

It may well seem that this article has "got nowhere," losing itself in rather superficial generalities. It never intended getting anywhere except to make some think again, and more deeply, about the Jewish missionary problem.

In less than one hundred and fifty years it would seem that over half-a-million Jews have been baptized, no small proportion of a people of some sixteen millions all told, yet their baptism seems to have had but little influence either on the heart or the mass of the Jews, and in all too many cases seems to have brought them and their children but little blessing.

Now we need not be surprised if the next twenty years should bring us as many baptisms as the previous hundred-and-fifty. Can

we be content that these "converts" should be no cause of blessing to Israel and remain nominal Christians?

By baptizing them we confirm the Jews in their belief that Christianity is but a formal system into which one runs for temporal advantage and refuge. By baptizing them we confirm the "converts" in their belief that there is, when all is said and done, very little reality in Christianity; more likely than not we for ever lock and bolt the door of faith for them. The Church, too, is only a loser, for it has already all too many nominal members.

Shall we baptize them? We cannot refuse water, where the Holy Spirit has been at work, but

surely we should refuse it where we have no proof of His working. Doubt on this subject will always be most easily resolved as the enquirer is brought into contact with the living Church of Christ.

The necessity of depending on a local community would have another very good effect. Since Hitler came into power, an increasing number of mission stations have had to be closed down in Greater Germany, and it is certain that wherever anti-Semitism rules, the Jewish mission will, sooner or later, have to close down. Surely it is the obvious policy so to work, that when that day comes there will be a community of Christians who will gladly carry on the work.

IN THE MINORITY

¶ In the old Czechoslovakia, the Czechs were only half the population. This accounts for some of their difficulties in dealing with the minorities.

Thirty per cent. of Greater Rumania, likewise, is not Rumanian, and the problem of the treatment of minorities here presents the usual difficulties.

Sixty per cent. of Yugoslavia is not Serbian, and the problem of treating the Croatian and Hungarian minorities is, therefore, peculiarly difficult.

Thus, millions of people have been separated from their mother countries and from their hereditary relationships by brute force, bloodshed and atrocities, the history of which has never been written. In spite of every stipulation that the rights of minorities should be under international control, out of the innumerable complaints sent to Geneva during twenty years, only three or four causes were examined by the League of Nations.

To-day, every third Magyar lives under a foreign yoke.

THE BETTER COUNTRY

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire, and whole and perfect, the service of my love,
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar, the dearest and the best.
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted, the final sacrifice.

And there's another country I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know.
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King,
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering.
And day by day, silently, her shining bands increase,
Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

Sir Cecil Spring-Rice.