

Jews, Judaism and Israel in the Theology of Saint Augustine

How He Links the Jewish People and the Land of Zion

by Marcel Dubois¹

It is always dangerous to present current questions to authors of the past, especially if the questions were not intrinsic to their work or their times. By introducing their thought in a problem that was not theirs, one risks attributing to them positions deduced from principles which might be difficult to apply in a context other than that in which they lived.

Such is precisely the danger when one turns to the Church Fathers to discover "what the Church thinks" about the link of the Jewish People with their Land. Undoubtedly, Christian theology has some traditional elements dealing with relations between Judaism and Christianity. However, we also know how delicate is their interpretation and, most of all, how great has been the negative weight of certain primary misconceptions about the tradition issuing from writings of the Fathers.

The problem is even more difficult when one deals with the permanence of Judaism, with the identity of the Jewish People and, by correlation, with the link that binds the Jews to their homeland. It is clear that since the inception of political Zionism and the creation of the State of Israel, the question has received a renewed and pressing actuality.

To this new form of a traditional question the Church Fathers evidently do not offer a direct reply. Is it possible, however, to detect in them elements sufficient for the elaboration of a reply? An exhaustive search in the patristic literature would be boundless. Therefore, one may legitimately propose to

1. This article is based on a lecture given at Rome on February 19, 1974 in a conference organized by SIDIC under the direction of P. Cornelius Rijk on the theme "People, Religion and Land for Jews and Christians." It was published as "*Les Juifs, le judaïsme et Israël dans la théologie de saint Augustin*," in the author's collection, *Rencontres avec le judaïsme en Israël* (Jerusalem, 1982).

limit the choice of study to one authority, viewed as being particularly representative. That is what leads me to examine Augustine.

Jews and Judaism are discussed extensively by Augustine in the context of his continual comparisons between the Old and New Testaments, with the double purpose of either expounding the continuity between the two or recording their mutual opposition. As to the more precise issue of their belonging to a homeland and of the link with one country, Augustine places it in the perspective of the homeland constituted by the "City of God," of which he traced the history.

In Augustine's theology, and in his vision of the history of salvation, what is his conception of the links between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel? In order to identify the elements of the reply, we shall use three concentric approaches. First, we shall recall how Augustine understands and interprets the relations between the Old and New Testaments. Subsequently, we shall see what is, in that context, the image that Augustine has of the Jewish People, its vocation and its destiny. Finally, we shall then be able to verify more accurately what can be, in Augustine's system, the reality and the meaning of the link between the Jewish People and the land of Zion. At that point, we shall perhaps discover the specific limitations imposed by the dualism of a certain Platonic mentality upon the theology of the history of salvation.

I. Augustine and the Bible

Augustine commented abundantly on the Bible. His *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and his *Tractatus in Joannem* are classics of Christian theology, and one can say that the whole of Augustine's work derives from the wisdom he finds in the word of God. It is indeed striking that his metaphysical reflection on God, humankind and the world is elaborated within the framework of revelation. Three times he returns to commentary upon Genesis because in this book of origins he finds the source or confirmation of his ideas about the mystery of Creation, the degrees of the creatures and the relationship between creature and Creator. Moreover, the vast epic of his *City of God* unfolds through the stages of the history of salvation as presented in the Bible.

On the other hand, Augustine was not an exegete in the technical and rigorous meaning that modern critique has given that word. As rightly noted by H. Marrou,² Augustine is more of a philosopher than a philologist. Furthermore, considering that in Augustine it is faith which inspires, controls and governs rational thought, in which philosophy and theology constantly interfere, the doctrine of faith is more important to Augustine than the preoccupation with exegetic rigor. The basis of his analytical work and of his religious thought is the Bible and its deep unity: the Bible as received by the Church and as read and understood by the Church. Augustine is far more an interpreter, commentator and preacher than a scientific exegete.

Nevertheless, his interpretation is not without instruments or rules. It will be easy to extract, by induction, the laws of Augustinian hermeneutics, starting

2. See H.I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et l'augustinisme* (Paris, 1955), pp. 72-74.

from his numerous commentaries. The task is made easier because Augustine himself listed the guiding principles of his reading of the Bible in a small treatise on Christian culture — the *De Doctrina Christiana*. Better still than what he actually did, we realize through it what he wanted to do.

1. Principles of Augustinian Hermeneutics

The *De Doctrina Christiana* is neither primarily nor only a treatise on exegesis. Since his conversion from Manicheanism to Christianity, Augustine wanted to identify clearly the new status of his intellectual life and put in order his readings, thoughts, and above all discoveries. God had become his sole object, and the small treatise is the balance sheet of the quest of Augustine the convert. In it he tries to define a Christian attitude toward culture. A rhetorician converted to Christ, a Platonic sage seduced by the wisdom of faith, he traces the program of an intellectual life which will be able to lead to that Christian wisdom.

It is in such a framework that he unfolds his theory of exegesis. He focuses his attention, in particular in Books II and III, on the interpretation of Holy Writ, because the Bible is the basic text, the “classic” of the educated Christian.

Augustine wishes to show how one can apply the resources of human science to the reading of the Bible. Science at that time was the art of grammarians and rhetoricians, and one knows to what extent that science was artificial and decadent. Augustine uses its methods in his own manner and yet produces a paradoxical result. It must also be noted that in reading his works one notices that he often neglected that technique, whose radical imperfection we can gauge. The transcendence of the *res* that is embodied, as he sees it, in Scripture often leads him to cut the corners of rigorous analysis. In Augustine, the investigation of the literal sense is already charged with spiritual preoccupations. This degree of precedence given to the spirit over the letter, both in the method used by Augustine and in the implied theological attitude, is absolutely decisive when we approach the theme that is the subject of our present essay.

To start with, consider the viewpoint of Augustine’s method and its instruments. He sees Holy Writ as a vast poem that sings, at times openly, at times symbolically, the realities of divine life. For him the divine life is a treasure of signs that enfold the *res*, the realities of salvation, which must be made manifest so that we may live by them. Augustine shows what conditions will lead to their discovery.

First of all, it is essential to define what is a sign. On this subject, the *De Doctrina Christiana* is one of the supremely clear expressions of the Augustinian conception of symbol and meaning. Here as well, we find the keys of both his theology of the sacraments and his biblical hermeneutics. Augustine enumerates different kinds of signs: literal or metaphorical, unknown or ambiguous, the various types of which he explains through the use of examples quoted from the Scriptures. Irrespective of that diversity, however, the most important factors are the inner structure of the sign itself and the conditions enabling its comprehension.

Augustine formulates on this occasion the two fundamental rules of the *intellectus spiritualis*, the “spiritual intellection.” The first is the consonance of

interpretation with the rule of faith, and ultimately with charity. The second is what one may call the "catholicity" of Holy Writ.

On the one hand, therefore, the Bible has but one message: the message of salvation. This is the mystery of God and its attending design which involves, on the part of man, observance of the precept of charity which, in turn, is the fundamental reality that assures the unity of the multiple and different signs.

On the other hand, in accordance with the picture of the Church both offering the biblical text and guaranteeing its contents, the Scriptures are "catholic," each of its component parts being a reflection of the whole. Nothing is to be found therein which does not conform to the global teaching transmitted by the Scriptures in their entirety. In other words, Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, receives the Christian truth through the Church, that is, through the **whole** of Holy Writ as the Church is accustomed to reading and understanding it. Confronted with any symbol, image or event presented by the Bible, he **finds again** through faith and humility the Christian truth — much more than he would do so by means of analysis. Undoubtedly, the exact and precise meaning of the text has an interest of its own, but that is not the major interest. For Augustine, the essential is to be found in the *res* transmitted by the Church and lived by the believer. Only the affinity with the realities expressed in the signs permits understanding of the signs that introduce them.

One is tempted here to ask whether Augustine is not enclosing himself within a vicious circle. Whence can he know the *res* of salvation other than through the Scriptures themselves? And how can those realities act as criteria for exactitude or for orthodoxy in the interpretation of the signs?

In order to understand and overcome this paradox, one must relate to Augustine's theory of knowledge: the theory of the Inner Master and Illumination. The theory of the sign exposed in the *De Doctrina Christiana* is absolutely consonant with the philosophy found in the *De Magistro*, where Augustine explains the relation between the *signum* and the *res*. Every teaching is made through signs, word or symbol. To understand is to grasp reality through the sign on the occasion of the sign. On the strength of his own spiritual experience, however, Augustine is convinced of the priority of the *res* over the sign that reveals it. All understanding presupposes a previous affinity with the reality under discussion.

Heidegger and Bultmann have reminded us, following Pascal, of the paradox that is implied in every spiritual intellection, every existential decision and, particularly, every attachment of faith. Therefore, rather than a vicious circle, one should in fact speak of a "hermeneutic circle." *Crede ut intelligas, intellige ut credas* ("understand in order to believe, believe in order to understand"), these two formulas, elaborated and transmitted by the Augustinian tradition as the rules of the intelligence of the mysteries of God, find in the interpretation of the Bible a privileged point of application.

The transcendence of the *res*, which are known as far as they are loved and lived, directs and controls the understanding of the signs. In short, if it is true that Augustine finds in the reading of Holy Writ the foundation for his religious thought and his Christian life, one has to qualify that statement by add-

ing that reference is made therein to the Scriptures in their totalizing unity, as understood by the consensus of the Church.

As we have just seen, such a conception at once implies and justifies a method in which the opposition between the letter and the spirit, and therefore the difference between the literal and the spiritual senses, intervene as fundamental principles. We shall consider briefly how they operate, but it is important to stress that such a view of things implies a theological attitude. On the one hand, the literal and the spiritual, the distinction between the text or event and their meaning, are no longer only principles of exegesis; they characterize the ways in which the Word of God can be read and through which one will be tempted to judge human hearts — their being spiritual or carnal, open or closed. On the other hand, if the understanding of the *res*, according to consonance with the rule of faith, does thus precede and transcend the letter itself of the text, one will be led to ask whether the interpretation given by Augustine to the history and the destiny of Israel, as presented by the Bible, indeed truly expresses the tradition of the Church.

2. The Meaning of the Scriptures: Spirit and Letter

If one accepts those two fundamental principles expounded by the *De Doctrina Christiana*, it becomes possible to pierce the outer layer of the biblical text, irrespective of the occasionally uncouth appearance of its style and of its incoherent or scandalous stories. During his Manichean period, both because of the prejudices of the sect and of the claims advanced by its estheticism, the rhetorician Augustine had experienced a certain revulsion for the Bible. The light thrown on the Scriptures by the Scriptures themselves, and the reference to the rule of faith, are the two keys that permit the believer to enter the text and understand the Word from within. One who approaches Holy Writ with faith, and no longer aided merely by the simple human light, discovers in the Scriptures the light of different meanings.

It is from the year 391, speaking about the Old Testament to his friend Honoratus who leaned toward Manicheanism, that we find Augustine perceiving in the Scriptures four different meanings:

Therefore, there is historical exegesis, when one teaches what is written, what has taken place, and what, although it did not take place, is written as if it had happened; etiological exegesis, when one shows the cause of such a fact or of such a word; analogical exegesis, when one establishes that there is no contradiction between the two Testaments, the Old and the New; allegorical exegesis, when one teaches that some passages must not be understood literally, but rather figuratively.³

Augustine appears here as one of the original witnesses of the long history of the four meanings of Scriptures.⁴ The possibility of different readings obviously reverts to the distinction between the literal sense and the meanings that can be perceived therein by the *intellectus spiritualis*. In fact, Holy Writ has a spiritual meaning, which is the most important for faith. Augustine distinguish-

3. *De Vera Religione* 50, 98; *De Genes. ad Litt.* 2, 5; *De Util. Credendi* III, 5–6.

4. H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Paris, 1959), introduction.

es, therefore, between the letter and the spirit just as one distinguishes in a living human between body and soul.

To denote each of these dimensions, he uses terms drawn from the Scriptures themselves, in particular from Paul and John. To indicate the letter, he uses, according to the occasion, *ad litteram*, *carnaliter*, *corporaliter*. For the spirit, he uses *spiritualiter*, *illustris intellectus*, *intellectus spiritualis*. "The letter and the spirit" — one understands what is suggested by this dichotomy, but also senses the dangers involved in the Platonic interpretation of such a comparison. Augustine reveals far more clearly the depth of his thought, his respect for the literal and historic truth and for the spiritual significance, when he opposes the *res gestae* (*secundum res gestas* — "according to the things that happened") to what he calls either *interpretatio allegorica*, *mystica significatio* or *transitus ad Christum*.

In fact, reacting both to the contempt of the Manicheans for the letter of the Scriptures and to the excesses of subtlety of a bad Origenism, Augustine, using a down-to-earth Latin, reads the Bible as a story in which the facts have indeed taken place according to the way they are narrated. That is why we do not find in him any hint that certain tales of the Exodus could have suffered an epic amplification or be simply symbols.

Augustine stands as the champion of the strict objectivity of facts. "Let no one say: indeed it is written that the water was turned into blood, but it is only an image. The fact did not take place. To speak in which manner is to revert to a search for God's will, while simultaneously insulting His might." The literal meaning is a real meaning that indicates what happened. One must underline this realism of Augustine, the importance of which is prominent in the problem we are analyzing. Augustine's conviction is that, barring a danger that they will rest upon nothing, the superstructures of the spiritual meaning must rest upon this historical foundation. He rejects those "constructions in the air" which do not rest on the historical foundation, which do not stand upon the *res gesta*.⁵ Moreover, Augustine believes that even tasted at such an inferior level, Holy Writ is nourishing. In a Psalm, for example, where the symbolic figures are intertwined, he admits that one is free to enjoy simply the letter.

In no way, however, does this commitment to realism prevent him from believing that "the Scriptures are always spiritual, irrespective of the fact that at times they seem to speak on a material level."⁶ That is why it is normal for him to climb to a higher level, that is, once the literal sense is fully understood, to ascend to the spiritual meaning. Augustine intends to lead his listener or reader to that higher level slowly but surely, sharing with him or her the words and the facts of the Bible. In addition, however much we have to admit the fundamental role of the literal sense, we must also abandon it at a very early stage. Augustine remarks that very often, in fact, the literal sense is in itself a figured sense.

5. *Subtracto fundamento rei gestae quasi in aera quaeratis aedificare*, *Sermo* II, 7.

6. *Sermo* XXIII, 3.

3. The Scriptures Are Spiritual: Sign and Res

Augustine asserts as if it were a natural fact that Holy Writ has a spiritual sense, more truthful and more enjoyable than the sense of its outer appearance: *Non esse accipiendum figuraliter, nullus christianus dicere audibit.*⁷ No Christian could deny that without temerity. If we had to accept to the letter some of the expressions of the Psalms, we would be thrown back into an imagery of sacrilege and ridicule. God would have a right hand as against a left; He would experience our passions, become irritated and wreak vengeance; He would be as ignorant as we are and would ask in order to know. Therefore, one has to purify those images which are below the dignity of divinity. *Invisibilis invisibiliter cogitate*; let us envisage the invisible world as beyond space. Let us understand that the Scriptures are spiritual, that they are animated by a movement of the Spirit which infuses spirituality into the letter and into the reader.

Paul says in the Epistle to the Romans (7:14): "The law is spiritual." This general proposition, which the Apostle himself clarifies by precise interpretations, must prevent the Christian from ever taking the Scriptures' literal sense to be the principal and final one. A "carnal" reader will not be able to understand the Bible, because, again in the words of Paul, "The animal man is unable to notice the things that stem from the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14–15).

This is not the place in which to detail, with Augustine, the many manners in which the Scriptures express themselves. Nor shall we here analyze the fixed rules that Augustine believed he could infer. Let us say simply that for him, as for the Fathers who preceded him, the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures is precisely that new and high significance through which the beings and the facts of which they speak represent Jesus Christ, and with him the Church, in all its extension and in all its history. "Throughout Holy Writ we find the Son of God," said Irenaeus, repeating an apostolic tradition. Following him, Origen and Jerome, and even more so than his predecessors, Augustine states that Holy Writ, the Old and the New Testaments, contain nothing but Christ. "Moses speaks of Jesus Christ in all his writings."⁸ That is the secret of the whole Bible.⁹ That is why "we must relate all to Christ if we want to tread the path of intelligence." Conversely, if in a given passage we have not found Jesus Christ, we remain at an inferior level of the scriptural meaning and we have not properly understood the text.¹⁰

We can now summarize what was the spiritual sense of the Scriptures for the ancient commentators and for Augustine, who elaborated their approach. At a

7. *De Genes. ad Litt.* I, 1.

8. *Contra Faustum* XVI, 9.

9. *City of God* XVI, 2, 1–3: *Haec scripturae secreta divinae indagamus, ut possumus, alius alio magis minusve congruenter, verumtamen fideliter certum tenentes non ea sine aliqua praefiguratione futurorum gesta atque conscripta neque nisi ad Christum et eius Ecclesiam, quae civitas Dei est, esse referenda.*

10. *City of God* XV, 26, 2: *Et fieri quidem potest, ut et nobis quispiam et alius alio exponat haec aptius, dum tamen ea, quae dicuntur, ad hanc de qua loquimur Dei civitatem in hoc saeculo maligno tamquam in diluvio peregrinantem omnia referantur, si ab eius sensu, qui ista conscripsit, non vult longe aberrare, qui exponit.*

first level, it meant that Holy Writ, irrespective of appearances, always speaks of divine realities and awakens in human beings the desire for invisible and eternal possessions. It is in this key, for example, that we must read the story of the miracle whereby the flour of the widow of Sarepta, at whose house Elijah the prophet was staying, was never exhausted. It invites us to discover a new appetite, a new nourishment, a new abundance. "The fact that God did not grant this nourishment to Elijah but for a few days was a *signum* of future life, where our reward will be endless. God will be our flour."¹¹ The literal sense provides the occasion for a transposition, in a single leap, to the figurative sense that speaks of eternal truths.

At a deeper level, however, and in a more rigorous and unique interpretation, the figurative sense speaks of Christ. Irrespective of the plurality of facts, of the length of time, of the obscurity or even the apparent scandal of its tales, the whole Bible speaks only of Jesus Christ. He is its center and also its sole focus of convergence. On the one hand, the Old Testament announces and prepares his coming; on the other, the life of the Church, as opened by the narrations of the Acts of the Apostles and continued throughout history, is a constant prophecy of the celestial life of the chosen.¹² Furthermore, the spiritual sense includes the total revelation of the mystery of Christ: a preparation, a coming, a consummation. A preparation slow and obscure, a coming at the same time shining and painful, a consummation in glory: that is the three-phased rhythm of the Christian event. Genesis, Exodus and Kings prepare the way for the Gospels; the Gospels point toward the Revelation of John. Perhaps one should say: the Gospels are the model for the Acts and prepare the way for Revelation. It is then and only then, after time, that in an eternal present everything is realized. Reality has emptied the figures, and Holy Writ is folded like a scroll that has become useless.

4. The Scriptures as Sacrament

If there is one notion that Augustine received from tradition and elaborated at length for the benefit of Christian theology, it is precisely that of the *sacramentum*. We have seen that its reflection upon the structure of the sign, in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, is applicable as well to his theory of knowledge, to his psychology of faith, to sacramental life, as to the reading of the sacred texts. It is not surprising, therefore, that the notion of *sacramentum* is one of the keys to his hermeneutics.

He receives from Paul the term and its significance. The Apostle speaks of God's design as "the sacrament of his will" (Eph. 5:12). Elsewhere he speaks of "the mystery that remained hidden throughout the centuries" (Col. 1:26). He characterizes the greatness of marriage by declaring that "this sacrament is great" (Eph. 5:32). *Mysterium, sacramentum, velatio*. These three terms are tightly linked in his theology of spiritual intellection.

Although this is not the proper place to trace its history, *sacramentum* originally meant a sacred reality, institution, doctrine, symbol, promise. Since

11. *Sermo* XI, 3.

12. *Sermo* CCLII, 7.

that sacred object was hidden, because of the respect that it inspired, one has been led to insist on the aspect of *velatio*. At the end of this evolution, the meaning of the word has doubled. At times it refers to what is hidden: the mystery, the *res*, and at times that which hides at the same instant when it presents itself anew: the sign, the symbol. In Augustine, in a manner clearer and more rigorous than his forerunners, the term signifies a mysterious action or a mysterious cultural act, the symbol therefore becoming more and more the essential nourishment of that mystery in action.

The term receives many applications around this central meaning in Augustine. It embodies not only the sacraments of Christian cult — baptism, Holy Communion, the seven-day cycle of which is yet to be determined — but also the sacramentals: holy water, ashes, the recitation of the *Pater Noster*, and the “sacrament of the symbol,” the “sacrament of the Word and the voice,” the liturgical feasts such as the “sacrament of the day of Easter.” Within this particular perspective, the words and the actions narrated in the Scriptures are obviously sacraments. The same applies, in an even wider and deeper approach, to the whole of the Bible. For Augustine, Holy Writ is filled with *sacramenta*, and is itself a vast sacrament.

What are the signs that indicate that the Scriptures, in one passage or another, enfold a *sacramentum* and therefore a hidden meaning? Those signs are very numerous, and Augustine’s mastery is supreme in describing them. Every rupture in the text, every evident omission, every apparent contradiction, whatever seems to oppose the order of the text or some other register, all lack of balance in the moral order, all appearance of scandal — such are the signs. At such moments, as Augustine puts it, God “winks” and sends a coded message that we have to decipher. A noun, the title of a Psalm, a pungent detail, is each a *sacramentum* which merits our pausing and trying to unravel it. That is a law applicable throughout: when two texts stand in contradiction, it need not be seen as a mistake or an accident. It is rather an invitation to pay attention and an indication of a teaching that must be unveiled.

To pay attention to what? To unveil what? The reality hidden by the sacraments and by Holy Writ is but the spiritual meaning which, as we have seen, is condensed in the mystery of Christ. It is necessary that our intelligence, upon meeting the *sacramenta*, should run to Jesus Christ who is both the Alpha and the Omega of the Scriptures. Thus, equally the sleep of Jacob, his night fight with the Angel, the adventures of the Jewish People in the desert, the exploits of David, the life of Solomon, are all typical events both real and mysterious that find their meaning in Jesus Christ.

Let us go back to the line of thought that leads to the conclusion just mentioned. It looks as if Augustine has somewhat skipped or glided in his conception of the Bible according to its sacramental significance. The latter, in fact, can be understood in two ways: starting from a general conception according to which Holy Writ in its entirety is a sacrament of a holy message, the Word of the Lord, we come to a more determinate and precise vision according to which within the Bible itself the Old Testament is the sacrament of the New, the latter being the *res* of which the former proposes the signs.

We can understand the reason for Augustine's gliding if we return to what we said earlier about the spiritual meaning. In fact, we are but stating again, in sacramental terms, the difference that we then noticed between the two possible ways of reading the Scriptures: the first open to the spiritual discovery of the divine and eternal reality; the second more clearly focused by the presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ in every word and every figure of the Old Testament. To say that the New Testament unveils the spiritual meaning of the Old, or that the Old Testament is the sacrament of the New, is to enunciate the same vision of Christian hermeneutics.

It is certain that this second way of reading the Scriptures represents the heart of Augustine's exegesis, what it has of a most pronounced Christian character. As a rhetorician at home with the play of words, Augustine coined concise formulas that express the relation between the two Testaments within the entirety of the Bible: *In veteri testamento est occultatio novi, in novo testamento est manifestatio veteri* ("In the Old Testament the New is concealed, in the New Testament the Old is made manifest").¹³ Or alternatively: *quandam et in veteri novum lateat, et in novo vetus pateat*.¹⁴

These formulas have become a part of Christian tradition, in which they were granted the status of principles, both on the level of the interpretation of the Scriptures and on the level of the elaboration of the liturgical texts. If they invite us to regard the Bible as one single whole, thereby including the People of Israel and their Book in one single adventure, the center of which is Christ, the risk that they present becomes immediately clear. It is the danger of a Platonic type of interpretation in which the antagonism between letter and spirit, sign and reality, old and new, Jew and Christian becomes the translation of opposing attitudes regarding the light and the truth. Augustine's thought is far from being that simple, but one must stress the danger of a quasi-Manichean reading of the contraries mentioned above. Over the centuries, such a reading was indeed followed. Furthermore, Augustine himself was occasionally dragged along by the particular dynamism of the structure of the opposed poles, as when he wrote: "The Old Testament is imposed on humankind from without, the New Testament is implanted in the inner faith. That is why one was written on stone, the other in the human heart."¹⁵ Even if we understand what he wants to say, and even if we make allowances for the rhetorical effect, we cannot deny the danger of such a simplification.

However, Augustine himself proposes a key to reading the Bible in which stress is laid more on the similarities and continuities than on the ruptures and differences. The secret is to be found in the essential role he attributes to faith in his theology of sacrament and, we might as well say, in his sacramental psychology. From every human being, Jew or Christian, who faces the *sacramentum*, the reading of a text of Holy Writ, the participation in liturgy, Augustine demands as precondition a particular inner disposition: faith. "Flesh is use-

13. *Sermo* CLXI, 6 and CCC, 3; and above all *Contra Adv. Leg. et Prophet.* I, 17, 35.

14. *Quaest. in Heptateuch.* II, 73 and 103.

15. *Quaest. in Heptateuch.* IV, 11; *Contra Adv. Leg. et Prophet.* I, 17, 35; and above all *De Spir. et Litt.* 17, 29.

less” and so are the gest and the letter. The use of the sacrament presupposes reliance upon faith or, as Augustine says elsewhere, *intellectus spiritualis* — an affinity with the meaning of the signs, an opening toward the spiritual significance of the Word. In order to understand the *res* implicit in the sign, one must accept the Spirit, drawing it into one’s self by means of an intelligent and loving affinity with the designs of God.

On this point Augustine is guided by Paul and stresses the similarity between Hebrews and Christians. He shows them both to be subject to the demands and benefits of faith — however much they find themselves within different regimes of the divine economy. Paul says, “In the desert, the Hebrews ate the same spiritual nourishment, they drank the same drink” (1 Cor. 10:3–4). Augustine comments: nourishment and drink, the same as ours. Moses, Aharon, Pineas ate the spiritual manna. Through the sign they touched the same reality as we did. The Christians, as beneficiaries of the sacraments of the new Law — baptism, communion, the feast of Easter — must be aware of the fact that before them a certain number of Jews had reached through faith the knowledge of Jesus Christ, had been nourished through it, had eagerly appreciated him. On the other hand, Christians who participate in the communion must be aware that receiving today the Body and the Blood of Christ would bring them no benefit if they did not join, by means of a living faith, that divine *sacramentum*. They must realize what they receive. Faith and fraternal charity are essential, otherwise they will simply grab with their teeth the bread of the altar, they will fill their stomachs with it by a purely carnal mastication.

Viewed from this perspective, the words, events and acts of the Old and of the New Testaments appear like sacraments of a unique mystery that appeals to the same attitude of faith. If the difference persists, it is viewed under another light that stresses the fundamental continuity of the *intellectus spiritualis*. The opposition is not between Old and New, Jew and Christian, but between closed and open hearts.

In Augustine this vision of things is so deep that at times it is as if he suppresses history. Differences are far less important than similarities. Finding in the Psalms fragments of the Gospels, or seeing in Abraham’s or Job’s behavior the perfection of the New Law, leads to a blurring of the distance in time.

Augustine was very much aware of this paradox, but he holds firm to both of these apparently irreconcilable aspects: unity and difference, immobility and progress. That is why he compares the Scriptures to a “two-edged sword.” But only one Word of God exists, and it “separates from the world whoever it strikes.” The two edges of the sword are the two Testaments: the Old speaks of temporal things, the New of eternal things. Jesus Christ handles that one sword and both Testaments speak only of the Savior and his grace.

Therefore we are in the presence of a special sacrament. In the case of a heart opening to the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ, the Old and the New Testament are one, both being a sign of the same reality. In the case of the accomplishment of that mystery in time, the Old Testament prepares and announces the New; the latter is fulfillment of the former. In fact, they are two stages of one same economy. The sacrament therefore receives a sort of inner

dynamism. Not only does the sign present the *res*, it is also permeated by it and contains its riches:

The people that received the Old Testament was somehow kept within the shadows and figures of things before the advent of the Lord, according to the admirable and perfectly ruled order; nonetheless, it harbored in its bosom a veritable foretaste of the New Testament, so much so that evangelic and apostolic doctrine holds no precept, no promise, however hard or divine, that are not found as well in the books of the Old Testament.¹⁶

Viewed from this perspective, the Old Testament is not only the sacrament of the New. It is also an announcement of it, it is permeated by it — as if the bread and the wine foretold and contained the communion in their own reality. This same perspective shows that the dynamism of God's design gives the *sacramentum* a new dimension, that of prophecy.

5. The Old Testament, Prophet of the New

In order better to explain the manner in which Augustine conceives the sacramentality of the Old Testament *vis-à-vis* the New, we have to return to it the dynamism of prophecy. Certainly, in the days of old that delineated and prepared the eternal gift of the Gospels, there existed individuals whom we call prophets and who recalled Israel unflinchingly to its mission, while at the same time announcing its term. Everything in that history was prophetic, everything drew forward thanks to a divine force — a force that saw the fulfillment to which it was leading the world and that wanted to lead it to that goal.

Here again, and even more clearly, Augustine juxtaposes two paradoxical statements. On the one hand, the vector of nature and history, the Old Testament, precedes and prepares the New. Opposing in particular the Manicheans, Augustine insists upon the blood bonds that linked Christ to his ancestors. Jesus descends from Adam, He has a body that comes from Mary, in the flesh he descends from David and Solomon. In this respect, one has to stress how important genealogies are for Augustine. Within the Gospel, genealogies are the vital link that, from the deepest of the biblical past, unites the Savior to human beings and to his people. The patriarchs and the kings of Israel were, in the most realistic meaning of the word, the seeds or the sowers of Christ.

Having strongly insisted upon the temporal priority, Augustine immediately follows with another priority: that of the intent of God. In scholastic terms, we might say that having described the order of implementation according to the interplay of the efficient causes, Augustine stresses the preeminence, in the order of finality, of the divine design that animates history. Certainly the New Testament comes after the Old, but the latter exists because of the former. In other words, the Old Testament prepares the New but is determined by it. As in every living existence, the Old Testament prepares the body of Christ while simultaneously it is animated by its spirit. For Augustine, the breath of the Word runs through all the ages; it gives life to Adam made of earth; it shapes the apostles by promising them the spirit of Christ. Between these two terms, the patriarchs, the prophets, the righteous who mark history, are equally ani-

16. Cf. *De Peccat. Merit. et Remiss.* I, 11, 13; *De Spir. et Litt.* 15, 17; *Contra Faustum* XVI, 20–21; *Contra Duas Epist. Pelag.* III, 9–10; and above all *Contra Adimantum* 3, 4.

mated by the Spirit of the Word. It is as if the Spirit of the Word precedes its own existence.

Here again Augustine finds his inspiration in Paul. When the Apostle considers the Old Testament as a sequence of generations, he declares: "The end of the Law is Christ" (Rom. 10:4). When he considers the way of life according to the precepts, he says correspondingly: "The plenitude of the Law is charity" (Rom. 13:1). That is, in effect, the type of causality that is at work all along the history of Israel. As would be the case with a living organism, animal or vegetable, in which the form of the whole, the finality of the fruit, is what directs and polarizes even the smallest part, Christ appears as Word before appearing as man. As an exemplary image and final cause of a gigantic perspective, the action of the Word becomes clear in History before the Advent because Christ draws to himself the duration of time. That is possible because it is the same Word that preexisted in the form of God and that descended into the world as flesh. "In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word became flesh" (John 1:1, 14). Augustine finds in these two verses of the Gospel of John the expression of the mystery according to which Jesus Christ influences time well before he himself is subject to time.

From such a perspective, the prophetic role of the Old Testament appears under a double aspect. The first is more vague and diffuse; in it desire and love have more place than clear vision. That is the aspiration Augustine recognizes in Matthew 13:17: "Many prophets and righteous men have desired..." All those men, *virii desideriorum*, men led by desire, eager for the messianic times, aspired with a strong sense of melancholy toward messianic salvation. But they could not see quite clearly under which guise the Savior would appear. Prophecy looks therefore like an ample river of emotions and dreams, leading a whole people and, with it, the whole of humanity.

At times, however, the prophetic announcement appears in a more clear and precise manner. Suddenly a word appears, a gesture of humility or of grandeur, which suits only a perfect and exemplary person. An aspect of Solomon's life, or a merciful attitude of David, radiates toward the future and sketches a face so beautiful that it can only be the Messiah's. Likewise Noah, the patriarchs, Samson, the prophets, Moses, Joshua, David priest and king, both each of them by his own existence and all together in their succession and in the development of their story, are living announcements of Jesus. They somehow breathe him, they think that he lives in them. Furthermore, there are occasions when the resemblance becomes more urgent. Thus Isaiah described the suffering Savior, or Job, himself a man of pains, announced him to whom all these traits will fully apply. In this same spirit Augustine recognizes the voice of Christ in the Psalms: poor, abandoned, suffering, triumphant, victorious. *Delin-eavit omnia*. In the Old Testament God drew the sketch that announces the Savior's visage.

Because of its characters and the events that they lived, the Old Testament is a continuous and abundant prophecy of the New. It is not only a concordant and convergent anthology of various writings, but also the total and perfect expression of what God had to tell us. All the history that it narrates, that of the

Jewish People, is permeated, both ways, by the influence of the Word that became flesh.

Unlike all other human beings, who owe their existence and their culture to the sap of a family, a race or a tradition that has preceded and prepared them, Jesus Christ precedes and inspires those who came before him. Certainly he descends from his forefathers, but in truth it is they who descend from him.

But what has then become of the actors and the witnesses of this immense prophecy? Augustine's reply to this question introduces us to his vision of the destiny of the Jews and of the sign of contradiction that Christ represents for Israel. When Augustine details the role of the prophets, he explains that they were aware of their message, that they understood the *sacramenta* in which they were involved. He applies the same idea in relation to that vast *sacramentum* which is the Bible, for which Christ is the key.

Many of the characters of the Old Testament, the great figures of the Jewish People, played their part in the sacred drama with full cognizance. Augustine's intuition finds due backing in two statements of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel: "Moses spoke of me" (5:46); "Abraham saw my day and rejoiced" (8:56). Augustine sees these two verses as the unifying bridge between the two Testaments. The Gospels fill Genesis and the whole of the Bible.

Nonetheless, apart from those eminent and exceptional men who were, so to speak, their head and their eyes, the People of Israel lived their prophetic life without understanding it. If the New Testament is the conscience of the Old, if all the Bible receives its meaning from Jesus Christ, the latter is for the Jewish People, in days past as today, a sign of contradiction.

6. The Christocentrism of Augustine

If one wanted to define in one word Augustine's reading of the Bible, it would suffice to state that it is unequivocally christocentric. Needless to say, whoever looks at Augustine's reading of the Bible from the outside will see such an exegesis as an annexation or, even worse, a sort of spiritual colonization. Augustine scrutinizes the Old Testament intensely; he respects the people that first received the message and that lived its history. None of this, however, makes sense unless viewed under the light of an interpretation that reveals, in the Old Testament, the all-pervasive presence of Christ. "The *intelligentia spiritualis* is Christian liberty."¹⁷

If one wants to understand — if not to justify — the heart of this spiritual attitude, it is important to recall that such christocentrism is typical not only of Augustine's analysis, but also of the totality of his thought. Augustine's doctrine is that of a convert who discovered Christ at the end of a long quest and who found in him the key to every truth. Thus considered, Augustine's work is much more the report of an adventure than the objective presentation of an order of nature. That is the reason why — as stressed by Etienne Gilson and many others — it is impossible to differentiate in Augustine between theology and philosophy. Not only is the difference between their respective methods not yet elaborated, for him there is only one vision of the world, that in which the

17. *Sermo XXV*, 2: (*Lex spiritualiter intellecta, evangelium est.*)

Word is the principle, and in which there is only one truth, Christ. If Augustine occasionally uses philosophical wisdom, it is because he sees in it a *preparatio evangelica* — a “preparation for the Gospel.” Furthermore, Augustine’s philosophical reflection, insofar as one can consider it on its own, bears the mark of that christocentrism. That is why, in view of the importance that it accords to the Interior Master, his theory of illumination applies to the problem of knowledge a structure that is first and foremost that of faith.

No wonder then, that in Augustine’s eyes the Old Testament is a preparation for the Gospel in a more pressing and open manner than all human wisdom. Such a view is neither automatically pejorative, nor does it necessarily entail a negative feeling for the Jewish People. It certainly expresses itself in terms of shadows and figures as opposed to the light and the fulfillment, but unlike Marcionism and antisemitism, it gives Israel a destiny positively linked to the destiny of Christianity. And again, in defiance of all dangers that may be implicit in a dualistic presentation — in which the old and the new, flesh and spirit, appear as contraries — Augustine contrasts Jews and Christians, Synagogue and Church, not so much as sociological realities but rather as spiritual attitudes according to which Christians are invited to judge themselves.

On this issue, Pascal gave a very apt abridgement of the thought of his master Augustine when he wrote: “There are New Testament Jews, just as there are Old Testament Christians.” This is a point to be remembered as we try to understand Augustine’s thought on the significance, past and present, of the Jewish People and their mission.

II. Saint Augustine, the Jews and Judaism

Contrary to what has sometimes been held, Augustine’s thoughts on the Jews and Judaism were not purely theoretical. In his days there existed in North Africa Jewish communities whose reality he grasped and whose vitality he assessed to the point of actually fearing their influence. This fact gives some of his writings a concrete and historical character that must not be underestimated. Nevertheless, unlike other Church Fathers such as Chrysostom, for whom the pastoral preoccupation is strongly marked by data gleaned from a sociological context in which antisemitism, alas, was not absent, Augustine’s view of Israel and Judaism is primarily theological. Even if he is at times severe and exclusive according to a dualism that we shall explain, even if the categories that he uses have been revived pejoratively by less lenient theologians, his thoughts on this matter derive less from a polemic spirit than from a meditation on the mystery of history.

1. The Meeting with Judaism

Professor Blumenkranz, with utmost precision and objectivity, has analyzed the historical circumstances that led Augustine to take a stand *vis-à-vis* the Jews and Judaism.¹⁸ That Jews in his day were widely settled in North Africa and that

18. B. Blumenkranz, “Augustin et les juifs, Augustin et le judaïsme,” *Recherches augustiniennes* I (Paris, 1958), pp. 225–241, and *Die Judenpredigt Augustins* (Basel, 1946)

their communities were thriving we know through the statements of Church Fathers who preceded the Bishop of Hippo: Tertullian,¹⁹ Cyprian,²⁰ Lactantius²¹ and Commodus.²² The context had not significantly changed in Augustine's lifetime, so much so that it will be possible to sketch, with the aid of allusions scattered throughout his works, a picture of Jewish life in Africa at the time. That is not surprising since Augustine, in his pastoral work, faced problems similar to those encountered by his predecessors. The seduction and missionary attempts of the Jewish communities were such as to attract both Christians and pagans, the latter attracted by the biblical revelation but torn between the Church and the Synagogue. The problem of the Judaizers, which since the first steps of the Church had been a raw nerve of Christian theology and pastoral work, was still very much alive in the days of Augustine.²³

Within the Church itself, moreover, the polemic with the heretic sects had a bearing on the confrontation between Jews and Christians. Whether dealing with dogma or with liturgy, Augustine's solicitude for his own flock led him to state in clear terms his doctrine on the Bible and on Judaism. This fact becomes all the more striking when we notice that he carried out his fight on several fronts. On one front, when facing the Manicheans, whose repugnance for the Old Testament is known, Augustine stresses the concordance and continuity of the two Testaments. On another front, however, he opposes doctrinal positions that are not dissimilar to Jewish conceptions: the ideas of the Pelagians, whose voluntarist humanism is very close to the Jewish view of religious observance; or the ideas of the Arians, whose trinitarian theology appears to be in agreement with uncompromising Jewish monotheism. Whether dealing with these doctrinal points or with questions of observance such as the issue of sabbatical fasting or the date of Easter, Augustine had to make clear beyond doubt his stand on the ideas or the practices of Judaism.

Nevertheless, as very aptly remarked by Professor Blumenkranz, "had there been neither Jews nor heretics around him, Augustine would not have evaded the confrontation with Judaism — a confrontation that is implicit in the heritage of the Church, with all the painful tensions that it implies. Like all other Christians who delve into their origins, Augustine cannot evade it; in fact, Augustine even less so because of his passionate desire to penetrate the hidden design of the lines of human becoming."²⁴ It is Augustine the theologian who comes to the fore, impelled by the needs of his research to scrutinize God's design and, in particular, the relations between the Old and New Testaments. Nonetheless, whatever the imperfections and limitations of his efforts, in the first part of our essay we have been able to realize their amplitude and depth.

and Paris, 1973); M. Simon, "Le Judaïsme berbère dans l'Afrique ancienne," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 26 (1946), 1ff. and 105ff.

19. *Adv. Iud.* I, CSEL LXX, p. 251.

20. *Testimonia*, CSEL III, 1., pp. 35–148.

21. *Divinae Institutiones* IV, 10–21, CSEL XIX, pp. 301–368.

22. *Carmen Apologet.*, vv. 693ff., CSEL XV, p. 160.

23. *City of God* XXII, 8, 21; *Sermo* CXCVI, 4, 4. Cf. Jerome, *Epist.* LXXI, 3, 5.

24. *Augustin et les juifs*, p. 228.

This contemplation of God's design could have consisted in a theology of the history of salvation as considered within the development of its successive stages. In this birth and evolution of the "City of God," the Jews prepare and announce the arrival of Christ. Augustine, however, was presented with a more troubling problem by the presence of Jews around him, indicative of the presence of an organic Judaism. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old, yet the Jews subsist as a people and as a religion. Is this not an indication of a fault in the accomplishment of the divine purpose? Augustine is led to ask the question and enquire what can be the present meaning of the existence of the Jews and of Judaism. What now can be their role, since from the Advent of Christ their mission is apparently over? We shall examine his reply. However severe the terms may appear, what we have just said is an assurance that Augustine, from the start, does not face the problem from a sectarian or sociological angle, but rather as an aspect of the mystery of salvation as it manifests itself throughout history.

2. A Fundamental Dualism

The manner in which Augustine conceives the link between the two Testaments indicates a particular vision of the two stages of divine economy, and correspondingly of the two conditions of the People of God: Israel and the Church. As we have stressed elsewhere, this relation, which could have been presented according to the dynamism of a given development, is often formulated by Augustine in terms of the fundamental opposition between flesh and spirit or letter and spirit. Within this perspective one witnesses a strange reversal of the literal sense and the historical reality.

The most typical example is undoubtedly found in the *Epistle to Asellicus*.²⁵ Commenting on the story of Sarah and Hagar, Augustine interprets the tale of Genesis according to the key proposed by Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians (4:22). He stresses that for the Jews, who adhere to the text of the Bible, Israel is the blessed posterity of Sarah, and likewise the sons of Ishmael, namely the gentiles, are the children of Hagar the servant. But Augustine inverts the terms of the typology: he opposes the carnal affiliation — the only one that Jews can claim — to the spiritual affiliation, the sole one that counts and which is the privilege and glory of the Christians. *Haec certa doctrina apostolica atque catholica satis evidenter indicat nobis secundum originem carnis ad Saram Judeos, id est Israelitas, ad Agar vero Ismaelitas pertinere; cundum autem mysterium spiritus, ad Saram Christianos, ad Agar Judeos.*²⁶ According to the carnal origin the Jews belong to Sarah, while Ishmael and the gentiles belong to Hagar; according to the mystery of the spirit the Christians are linked to Sarah, while the Jews relate to Hagar.

Here Augustine is the heir of a Christian exegesis stemming from a long tradition, way back to the Epistle to the Romans (9:12). Paul took the destiny of Esau and Jacob as a fundamental example of the fall of the Jewish People and

25. *Epist.* CXCVI, 3, 13; cf. *Quaest. in Heptateuch.* 1, 70; *Enarr. in Ps.* XXXIII, 3 and CXIX, 7.

26. *Epist.* CXCVI, 3, 13.

the rise of the gentiles. He found in the words of Genesis 25:23, “the elder shall serve the younger,” the statement of a principle of inversion or substitution. Long before Augustine, several Church Fathers had made use of this principle, and they had gradually extended the list of the events of the biblical narrative in which it is active in exemplary fashion. Indeed, they applied it to every case in which two characters confront each other in opposition, and in which the younger or the humbler supplants the elder or the stronger. We find in Augustine the list of such traditional couplings: Cain and Abel,²⁷ Eli and Samuel,²⁸ Saul and David,²⁹ which he applies to the elucidation of the same mystery.

In the same *Epistle to Asellicus*³⁰ and on several other occasions, he applies identical reasoning to Esau and Jacob, effecting the same reversal in opposition to Jewish exegesis — which sees in this story the justification of Israel’s primacy. Augustine teaches that according to the coordinates of the New Testament, the Jews are represented by Esau and the Christians by Jacob. The same reading says that the Christians may claim Jacob as their father.³¹

Sifting through the data of the *Epistle to the Romans*, Augustine distinguishes between Jews and Christians as the children of the flesh and the children of the spirit. Children of Jacob according to the flesh, the Jews are not entitled to the heritage.³² Accordingly, it is within the Christian people that the true line of Abraham comes to fruition.³³ In short, the true Jews are the Christians,³⁴ the true Israel is the Church of the gentiles: “He who imitates Abraham, he is the son of Abraham.”³⁵ In the context of this opposition, and within the terms of this substitution, considering that the Christians have replaced the Jews just as Esau was the servant of Jacob-Israel, the latter has now become the servant of the Christians who, in turn, are the true Israel.³⁶

3. The Continuing Role of Judaism

Irrespective of the reversal of roles, the Jewish People in their present existence preserve a paradoxically providential role. They are to this day mysteriously marked for this purpose. “Elder son, the rejected people; younger son, the beloved people.” The elder will be the slave of the younger, therefore, as far as we Christians are concerned: “Cain, that elder brother that killed his brother Abel, was marked by a sign so that we should not kill him — and the same applies to the Jewish People — so that they will subsist.”³⁷

What is the reason for this permanence? What is the role that is thereby conferred? Augustine took upon himself the task of defining the above through

27. *Adv. Iud.* 7, 9; *City of God* XV, 7, 2; *Enarr. in Ps.* LXXVII, 9 and CXVIII, 5, 3.

28. *City of God* XVII, 4, 9 and 5, 1.

29. *City of God* XVII, 7, 4 and 8, 1; *Enarr. in Ps.* LI, 1, LIII, 1 and LVI, 3.

30. *Epist.* CXCVI, 3, 12.

31. *City of God* XVI, 35; *Enarr. in Ps.* XLVI, 6, LXXVII, 9 and CXVIII, 5, 3.

32. *City of God* XVI, 42; *De Doct. Christ.* III, 24, 49.

33. *City of God* XV, 2.

34. *Enarr. in Ps.* LXV, 1 and XLVII, 11.

35. *Enarr. in Ps.* CXLVIII, 7; *De Doct. Christ.* III, 24, 48.

36. *Enarr. in Ps.* LVII, 1 and XLVII, 11.

37. *City of God* XV, 7, 2; *Contra Faustum* XII, 9; *Enarr. in Ps.* LXVII, 9 and CXVIII, 5, 3.

the use of formulas in which his rhetorical skill assured the proper balance. He played with some of those assonances that strike a chord in the memory and that tradition has safeguarded, by a far-too-often repeated insistence on the negative aspect of the opposition that they express.

Israel received the Bible, but it is the Christians who are duty bound to read it because it was meant for them. Augustine reduces the Jews to the subordinate role of bearers. The Holy Book was entrusted to them not for their own use or for their salvation, but so that they should be its carriers for the service and benefit of the Christians, just as the librarian slave sweated under the burden of the books of his master: *Codicem portant Judeus, unde credat Christianus. Librarii nostri facti sunt, quomodo solent servi post domino codices ferre, ut illi portando deficiant, illi legendo proficiant.*³⁸

Portat, credat, portando, legendo, deficiant, proficiant — we have here again that great rhythm of opposition to which we have grown accustomed thanks to Augustine's concise formulations. As we have already noticed, the linchpin of contradiction is faith in Christ. Having refused to recognize the Messiah through the Scriptures, the Jews are condemned no longer to understand those same Scriptures; for them, Holy Writ is now void of sense since the Old and New Testaments make one another clear. *Novum testamentum in vetera latet, vetus testamentum in nova patet.*³⁹ Not having acknowledged the light, the Jewish People is no more than "a sort of archivist for the Christians, burdened by the weight of the Law and of the Prophets, in testimony of the truths taught by the Church so that we may honor through sacrament what He announces through the Scriptures."⁴⁰

Archivist, ignorant of the treasure that he is keeping; messenger, not conscious of the novelty that he brings; such is now the Jewish People *vis-à-vis* the Book of which it is the keeper. The opposition, so often stressed, between the letter and the spirit, finds expression in contrasts that characterize the attitude of the Jews and the resulting situation for them. Blindness and lucidity: "What infamy is theirs, my brethren? They stand in front of Holy Writ like a blind man before a mirror, he unable to see himself, the others staring at him."⁴¹ Immobility and marching forward: "Like milestones along the route, the Jews inform the traveller, while themselves remaining nailed and motionless."⁴²

However much that blindness and stagnation have a negative characteristic, the sheer permanence of the Jewish People gives it a paradoxically positive character. To start with, in the situation of Augustine's day for the benefit of the Christian people and for the announcement of the Word of God to the world; and also, on a larger range, as the touchstone for a final accomplishment in which "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26).

More incisively than the other Fathers of the Church, Augustine insisted upon this aspect of Israel's persistence as a people:

38. *Enarr. in Ps. LXVI*, 9.

39. *Contra Adv. Leg. et Prophet.* I, 17, 35.

40. *Contra Faustum* XII, 23.

41. *Enarr. in Ps. LVI*, 9.

42. *Sermo CXCIX*, 2.

The Jews are witnesses. They were witnesses in the past, when they were, for some time, the trustees of Revelation. They are witnesses today of that faith preached by their prophets, enshrined in the book that they call theirs and which, through their rejection of Christ, they have rejected as well. Thus, the Jewish race subsists because it has a mission to carry out. Its reason for existing today is its own condition, it is the blows announced by the prophets, which it endures because it did not recognize the Messiah and which are manifestations of divine justice. Even the attachment of the Jews to their Law, however partial and carnal, is like a sign and a testimonial. The Jews remain closed within that blind fidelity: so that they may assume the judgment and provide us with the witness (*ut sibi sumant iudicium, nobis praebeant testimonium*).⁴³

The last assertion is repeated in a formula which was picked up by many compilers through the centuries and used as a dangerous slogan: "They are witnesses to their iniquity and to our truth" (*Testes sunt iniquitatis suae et veritatis nostrae*).⁴⁴ For our faith, they are witnesses of that divine justice that was weighed out upon them. Thus, paradoxically, the defence and the justification of the Christian faith does not object to the persistence of the Jews; they rather demand it.

In order to justify this thesis, Augustine often makes recourse to Psalm 59 (11–12): "The Lord used my enemies to instruct me; let them not die of fear, that they should not forget your Law; disperse them through your strength." Addressing the Jews, Augustine reflects: "That is why you do not forget God's Law; but you carry it everywhere as a proof among the peoples, as a shame for you and, without understanding it, you show it to the people that has been called from east to west."⁴⁵ In this analysis, the Jews' permanence in their fidelity to the Law is the condition for the two-faced testimonial that is now their paradoxical function: **proof** for the nations, **shame** for themselves.⁴⁶

In addition, the role of the Jews being what it is, their dispersal among the nations has played in favor of the Church and of its universal extension:

The prophecies that come from the books of our enemies are enough for us. And we know that, because of that testimony which, however unwillingly, they present in our favor, by keeping and guarding those books, they themselves were dispersed among all the nations, wherever the Church of Christ is present. In the Psalms that they read there is a prophetic announcement "disperse them through your strength." In this manner, God has established the favor of his grace, and has revealed it to the Church, in the matter of His enemies the Jews — because, in the words of the Apostle, "their crime is the salvation of the gentiles" (Rom. 11:11). God has not made them perish, He has not destroyed in them their quality of Jews — even when they were defeated and crushed by the Romans, for fear that, forgetting the Law of God, they would not be able to present the testimony of which we speak. Thus the words "do not kill them, lest they forget Your Law" would be without importance but for the presence of the following "disperse them." For, had they remained with that testimony of the Scriptures confined in their own country, instead of being everywhere, the

43. *Sermo CCI*, 2.

44. *Enarr. in Ps. LVIII*, 1, 22.

45. *Adv. Iud.* 7,9.

46. *Ibid.*

Church, which is everywhere, would not have been able to have them in all nations as witnesses of the prophecies that had foretold the advent of Christ.⁴⁷

Thus Israel, dispersed over all the earth, brings the gentiles prophecies above any suspicion. However, we perceive the internal contradiction that such a destiny implied in the eyes of Augustine. On one hand, it is through their obstinacy in guarding their identity that the Jews are useful to the Church, as Augustine remarks in his comments to Psalm 58:

The Jewish People must exist so that the number of Christians will grow. Here they are, dispersed within all nations, but they remain Jews, and they do not cease to be what they were. They entered Roman legislation without shedding their Jewish form (*formam Iudaeorum*). Subject to the Romans, they keep their own laws, the laws of God.⁴⁸

Refusing assimilation and defending their identity, they guarded the faith for the benefit of the Church which took advantage of that intransigence. On the other hand, if the testimony of the true God and the message of the Scriptures have been spread through the world, it is because of the dispersion which, for Augustine as for most of the Church Fathers, is a consequence of their fall. Indeed, even their fall was useful: *casum Iudaeorum utilem fuisse*.

Two formulas express the paradoxical character of the current destiny of the Jewish People in Augustine's theology: *Forma Iudaeorum*, an identity that had to be kept in order to testify to the existence of the true God; and *Casus Iudaeorum*, an error or fault that led to their dispersion.

4. Augustine's Hope and Prayer

If Israel's "fall" is for Augustine one of the factors of the Jews' current condition and of the paradoxical mission that derives from it, it is important to clarify immediately what was that fall in Augustine's eyes. The Jews' fault is their blindness: they have not acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, the son of God and Savior.

Two remarks are imperative here. First, in order to understand Augustine's thought in all its implications, it is essential to place the case of Israel's blindness within the general framework of his doctrine of knowledge, and in particular of his theory of illumination. The exemplary value of the destiny of the Jews, in the context of all spiritual destiny, then becomes clearer. Second, we must underline the fact that unlike many other Church Fathers such as Justin or Chrysostom, Augustine refused to speak here of deicide:

God resurrected and many believed. They had crucified him without understanding. But later they believed in him and their fault was forgiven. The blood of God, which they had shed, was forgiven to the **murderers**. I do not say the **deicides**. For, had they understood, they would not have crucified God in his glory (1 Cor. 2:8). Their homicide of an innocent was forgiven; the blood that they had shed in folly they drank in grace.⁴⁹

Thus, in this case following in the footsteps of Peter and Paul, Augustine was well aware that precisely because the Jews had not recognized Christ as God in

47. *City of God* XVIII, 46.

48. *Enarr. in Ps.* LVIII, 2, 12.

49. *Enarr. in Ps.* LXV, 5.

glory, they cannot be accused of having killed God. Nonetheless, he also insists upon what we may call the paradox of redemption in which the Jews are, in the eyes of Augustine, the first beneficiaries. The blood that they have shed can become, through faith, the blood that saves them: "They believed, they were baptized, they converted. The conversion has been made. Which conversion? The blood of Christ, that they had shed in their cruelty, they drank in faith." *Sanguinem Christi, quem saevientes fuderunt, credentes biberunt.*

That reversal of the attitude of the Jews, passing from blindness to acknowledgement of Christ, from refusal to invocation — as it would have been said by Gabriel Marcel — is at the center of Augustine's hope, according to a certainty the foundation of which he finds in the Epistle to the Romans. That will be the fulfillment of Israel's vocation. Thus he remarks that among those who crucified Jesus, there were many chosen: "Many of those who crucified God have shown, by their conversion, that they were chosen; chosen at the very moment of their conversion, if one speaks of the beginning of their salvation, but chosen since before the creation of the world, if one considers God's pre-science."⁵⁰ Moreover, who formed the initial Church if not Jews who have been granted grace?

Was it not dust, that Zion that crucified God! What am I saying, dust of ruined scattered remains! Yes, it was but dust. But not in vain someone had said of that dust (Luke 23:34), "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" And from that dust is made the wall of thousands of believers who place the value of their goods at the feet of the apostles. That dust becomes a humanity full of force and beauty. Who among the gentiles resembles them? And how few will do what they in their thousands do? Because they are three thousand (Acts 2:41), and then five thousand (4:4), living together, placing at the feet of the apostles the value of their possessions so that it be distributed among all, to each according to his needs (4:35), and having together, in God, only one soul and only one heart. Who then, has made appear from dust those thousands of believers, if not God? He who created Adam from dust? See what he has made of Zion; but he has not done it only in Zion.⁵¹

Thus, despite the infidelity or passing blindness, the vocation of Zion, in other words of the Jewish People, is that of announcing, preparing and realizing the Church, in the line of a unique design, in which the salvation brought by the cross of Jesus even to those who crucified Him ensures reparation and continuity. On this level Israel's destiny has a mysterious meaning in its relationship with the destiny of the entire Church. In order to explain God's design, Augustine applies to Israel and the Church the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The elder son — the Jewish People — will return to his home when the younger son — the pagan nations who had lost themselves in idolatry — will come back to the Father.

Israel reviles and refuses to enter. But when all the nations will have come to the house of the Father, he will come out in due course so as to save all Israel. The partial blindness of Israel, indicated by the absence of the elder brother, who is in the fields, must last until all the nations, embodied in the younger brother, lost far away in the idolatry of the pagans, return in order to feast in abundance. Because one day the vocation of the Jews for the salvation that

50. *Epist.* CXLIX, 20.

51. *Enarr. in Ps.* CI, 15.

comes from the Gospels, will become manifest. Then the Father must come out, to invite the elder son.⁵²

That return will be the accomplishment of God's design. Augustine saw that destiny of the Jewish People in the light in which Paul had announced its fulfillment, "All Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26):

A day will come, at the end of the centuries, when all Israel will believe. Not the Israelites of today, but their descendents.... When all the people, elder and younger, will be unified, *quando autem factus fuerit unus totus populus*, then will be realized the word of the Psalm that we sing: I shall be gratified when your glory will appear. Then will become true the promise we were made of the vision face to face.⁵³

Augustine does not indicate the time of this accomplishment. In fact, he seems to see in it the end of times, but, like Paul, he takes it for a certitude. We can state quite positively that Augustine's view of the Jewish People is animated by a triple sentiment: respectful gratitude, compassion, hope. Respect and gratitude for the people who prepared the way for the Church and to whom the Church owes its existence. Compassion because that is the feeling of God Himself for His people. Paul already had asked the gentile Christians — the graft transplanted into the olive of Israel — not to humble the Jews (Rom. 11:17). Augustine reverts to this image in order to voice his hope and to state the final redemption of Israel through divine grace. Such a sentiment entails neither spite nor a feeling of superiority *vis-à-vis* the Jews. On the contrary, Augustine invites the Christians to humility; he calls upon them to acknowledge the grace of which they themselves are the object, and to recognize the roots from which they have come: *Nec superbe gloriemur adversus ramos fructos. Sed potius cogitemus cuius gratia et quanta misericordia et in qua radice inserti sumus.*⁵⁴

Respect for the roots and for the promises they carry; hope in a glorious and final accomplishment; grace and patience before a present the darkness of which we deplore but which we know will be passing and provisional — if we had to condense in one word Augustine's attitude to the Jews, we might say that his is a theological optimism. In fact his dominant trait, irrespective of some movements of apparent impatience or severity, is a certitude which, like Paul's, is based upon the dynamism of God's gift. Were we to forget that dynamism, we would face the risk of having but a static opposition: letter versus spirit, carnal versus spiritual, shadow versus light; a process of preparation and accomplishment. That is what all too often is done by the theologians, for example

52. *Quaest. Evang.* II, 33.

53. *Epist.* CXLIX, 19. In this letter to Paulinus of Nola, the Israel that will be saved includes gentiles as well as Jews: "The plenitude of nations will enter among those who are called according to God's purpose. Thus all Israel will be saved. For all those who are called, whether Jews or gentiles, according to God's will, those are the true Israel, the Israel of God, on whom the Apostle (Gal. 6:16) invites peace and grace."

54. *Adv. Iud.* 10, 15.

the apocrypha published under his name⁵⁵ which have used the letter of his work without respecting the spirit. In truth, Augustine himself, like most of the Church Fathers, has swung between those two manners of considering the destiny of the Jews. His thought on the bond between the Jewish People and their land is, in fact, one of the moments in which we detect the tension inherent in the actual mystery of Israel.

55. B. Blumenkranz, "La survie médiévale de saint Augustin à travers ses apocryphes," in *Augustinus Magister* (Paris, 1954), pp. 1004–1101, and "Une survie médiévale de la polémique antijuive de saint Augustin," *Revue du Moyen Age Latin* 5 (1949), 193–196.

III. The Link Between People and Land

Needless to say, it would be anachronistic to question Augustine on the link between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel. What we have gleaned from his work in the first two sections of our enquiry clearly shows that in the context in which Augustine lived that question could hardly arise. The Jews are considered in their present state not in relation to an earthly country, not even as a nation with its own present entity, but in their spiritual and theological situation as related to the Church. The latter is the embodiment of the People of God, the new Jerusalem, the true Israel. Whether dealing with the passage from the Old to the New Testament or with the right of the Jews to subsist as a people, the whole of Augustine's synthesis evidently shows that the territorial dimension of Judaism is of no more than vestigial significance because the promises have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the whole of the Earth has become the Land of the People of God.

It might therefore seem pointless and out of order to ask Augustine what is the link between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel. Nonetheless, it is worth asking that question, first of all because from Augustine's theology, as well as from the theology of the Church Fathers in general, some arguments have been extracted which are supposed to justify, in the name of tradition, the rejection of the return of the Jews to Zion. It is important to check the validity of those arguments. In addition, considering the fact that the Jews subsist and have maintained, irrespective of their dispersion, a keen consciousness of their existence as a nation, it seems that also Christian theology cannot evade that reality. Finally there is another more radical manner of posing the question which reveals the extent to which it is legitimate. One can formulate the question in terms of a hypothesis which is not without foundation. On the supposition that the whole of Israel had accepted Christ and entered the Church, becoming an *ecclesia ex circumcissione* in its totality, what would then have been the link between that fraction of the Christian people and the land of its fathers, the land where its history unfolded?

When trying to give a reply to that question, it is possible on the one hand that we shall have to take note of the faults of Augustine's synthesis, and on the other that we shall discover the origin of some schools of thought that still have an impact today on the Christian appraisal of the Land of Israel. When he comments on the Old Testament, Augustine admits without hesitation that the Land was given to the Jewish People by virtue of divine promise, and that Jerusalem is the City of David. Yet when he contrasts the before and the after, the carnal and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly, the symbol and reality, and when he places all these pairs on parallel planes, we can detect the danger of a certain Platonism that gives that typology an excessively pejorative flavor. In his theological synthesis, therefore, it is important to distinguish between what derives from his faith and what derives from his philosophical instruments. An attentive reading of the texts may allow us to view the latter critically, while still respecting the former. This will be our purpose in the third section of this essay.

1. Link Between People and Land in the Two-Cities Perspective

Since the synthesis of Augustine on this theme did not vary, it will not be necessary for us to spend time tracing its historical development. We can introduce its elements systematically, "according to the order of the reasons."⁵⁶

We shall start our reading by going through a text that from the beginning will provide us with the key to understanding the whole system, since it presents a general view of Augustine's theology on the history of Israel, the vocation of the patriarchs, the identity of the Jewish People, the link of that people with its Land by virtue of the covenant. It is found in chapter 30 of the *De Catechizandis Rudibus*. There Augustine speaks first of Abraham, the patriarchs and the gifts that were given to them in the context of the struggle between the "Holy City," that is the totality of God's faithful servants, and the demons:

Certainly, even at that time righteous people were not lacking who piously sought God and conquered the pride of the demon. They were the citizens of the Holy City, cured of their pride thanks to the humility that came from Christ, their king, who revealed to them the Holy Spirit. Among them Abraham, a pious and faithful servant of God, was chosen (Gen. 12) to receive the revelation of the mystery of God's Son, so that later all the faithful of all the nations, by imitating his faith, could be called his future children. From Abraham was born a people destined to worship the only true God, Creator of heaven and earth, while all the other nations were slaves of idols and demons. Within that single people the Church of the future was certainly sketched much more clearly. That people certainly did include a carnal multitude who worshiped God on account of His visible benefits. Yet a small number of different men were also to be found in that people, men whose thoughts were oriented to the future rest and to the aspirations for the Heavenly Country. To these men was revealed prophetically the future humility of God, our king and Lord Jesus Christ, so as to heal them, through this faith, of all pride and pomposity. These righteous ones, who preceded in time the Advent of the Lord, prophesied not only by their words but also by their lives, their marriages, their children, their acts, the present time when the Church, through its faith in Christ's passion, gathers all the nations.

Through the holy patriarchs and prophets, the carnal People of Israel — later called the Jews — were handed both the visible favors that they wished from the Lord, and the physical punishments meant to strike them with terror, according to the circumstances and appropriate to their hardness of heart. The whole, having the aspect of spiritual mysteries, was related to Christ and to his Church, to which those righteous ones belonged — irrespective of the fact that they had lived before the carnal birth of Christ, our Lord. For the unique Son of God, the Word of the Father, equal to and coeternal with the Father, through whom everything was made, himself became man on our account, so as to be, for the Church in its entirety, what the head is for the whole of the body.⁵⁷

Abraham and the patriarchs are presented here as the citizens of a "city." What city? The "Holy City" to which they belong because they conquered the pride of the demon and because they bear, in advance, the humility of Christ

56. This formula is taken from the title of the work of M. Guroult, *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons* (Paris, 1953), which reconstructed the philosophy of Descartes from within, starting from its principles.

57. *De Catech. Rud.* 19, 33.

yet to come. Augustine praises Abraham, the faithful servant of God, because he has been chosen — *electus* — to receive the revelation of the sons of God. But of what people is Abraham the father? Who are his stock? His children are the faithful of all the nations. They are chosen among the nations in order to imitate his faith and to form a people. Certainly the people that descends from Abraham according to the flesh has in itself a positive value: it is the figure of the Church. As such, however, Abraham's issue are a carnal multitude, attached and grounded to earthly material favors. From within that multitude, a small nucleus stands apart; because of its aspiration and desire, it belongs to a country, but a heavenly country, and it announces Christ and the Church.

We immediately notice where the cleavage takes place. The true progeny of Abraham is a spiritual progeny which consists both of a small fraction of a multitude and of a bigger community, spread among the nations, not limited by the bonds of flesh. What becomes of the link of the Jewish people to its Land from such a perspective? In chapter 30 of his *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, Augustine recalls that the Jewish People received the gift of the Law and he explains its meaning:

The Jews received the Law, written by the hand of God. It was written on stone tablets, it is true, to stress the hardness of their hearts, bent as the Jews were upon not observing the commandments. Because what they wanted most from God were material benefits, they were refrained more by fears on the level of the flesh than by spiritual charity.

However, only charity can lead to the fulfillment of the Law. Therefore, the Jews were burdened by a great number of visible symbols which bore upon them as the yoke of slaves, in terms of dietary prescriptions, rules on the sacrifices of animals, and many more rites. Such rites were, as well, the signs of spiritual realities which bore relation to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the Church. And it so happened that a small number of righteous men interpreted them as bearers of the fruits of salvation, and respected them according to the usages of the time, while the mass of the people, in their fleshly bonds, were content with practicing those signs without grasping their meaning.⁵⁸

Thus, through varied and numerous signs of events that lay in the future, far too many to be fully listed, and which we now see becoming reality within the Church, that people was led to the Promised Land where it was to reign at will. But that earthly kingdom was also the image of the heavenly kingdom. There Jerusalem was founded, the very illustrious City of God, slave city that announced the free city, the one called "heavenly Jerusalem," a Hebrew word that means "vision of peace."

The citizens of the latter are all the men that were, are and will be sanctified, and all the sanctified spirits as well, and including those, whoever, that in the highest of heavens, far from imitating the profane pride of the Devil and his angels, obey God in pious devotion. The king of that city is Jesus Christ, who, being God's Word, is the commander of the angels of high, and who, being the Word made flesh, has also taken upon himself the command of men so as to have them reign all together with him in eternal peace. The forerunner of Christ the King, in the earthly kingdom of Israel, is King David, from whose carnal race was to come our truest king, our Lord Jesus Christ, who stands above all the blessed in the consummation of centuries (Rom. 9:5).

58. *De Catech. Rud.* 20, 35.

On this Land of Promise many events took place that symbolize the Advent of Christ and of the Church, and about which you may gradually learn in the holy books.⁵⁹

In this text we perceive the fundamental dichotomy, the dualism that we shall find in all the theology of Augustine: an opposition between the law of the flesh and the law of the spirit, between carnal inquietude and spiritual charity. Why was the Law given to that people, Augustine asks? By means of thinly veiled allusions to the second Epistle to the Corinthians (3:2–3),⁶⁰ where Paul opposes the Law engraved in stone to the Law written on human hearts, Augustine replies that the Law engraved in stone was given to the Jews because of the hardness of their hearts. He develops his comment by means of a series of typical contrasts: the desire of material gifts versus the charity of the spirit; the visible symbols versus spiritual understanding; the yoke of slavery versus the freedom of the saints. Nevertheless, as if to temper the rigor of that dichotomy, Augustine acknowledges the value and reality of that earthly regime, including its dwelling in a country in which, however, he sees only the figure of a spiritual kingdom: the Church, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Therefore, Augustine's reply to the question that we have posed is clear and its terms are simple. The reply consists of a parallelism that brings to a clash the opposition between flesh and spirit, earthly and heavenly, past and present — the various pairs superimposed on one another and finally identified with one another. The Jewish People received a kingdom on earth, linked to a territory in which a people of flesh lives. The gift of that land is included in the gift of another Law that the people, thus marked, observes in a carnal manner without grasping its significance.

In order to discover what can be, in that perspective, the meaning of the Jewish People's link with the Land, it is illuminating to consider the manner in which Augustine introduces two elements of the covenant which appear, in the text of the revelation as well as in Jewish consciousness, to be directly linked to the gift of the Law: circumcision and the Sabbath, regarding which we shall encounter once again the presence or application of the same fundamental structure of opposition.

2. Circumcision as Shadow and Figure

Augustine's thought about circumcision derives directly from Paul's. A particularly concise version can be found in his polemic *Contra Adimantum*:

This text of the Apostle that Adimantus quotes as being opposed to the Old Testament: it was completely impossible for him to notice that it was not so, because his eyes are open only to criticizing Scripture, but not to examining it. In fact, he quotes from the Apostle (1 Cor. 7:18–19): "Was any one called, being circumcised? Let him not try to hide his circumcision. Was anyone called, being uncircumcised? Let him not have himself circumcised. Both circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing. What indeed is all, is the observation of the commandments of God." Is there anything clearer? The Apostle wants each one to remain as he was called. In fact, once those things had been made, observance of which were the shadows, it came to pass that one had to demon-

59. *De Cathech. Rud.* 30, 36.

60. Cf. *De Spir. et Litt.* 17, 29 and numerous other texts.

strate that hope is not to be placed upon the shadows, but rather upon those things the shadows of which indicated that they were about to arrive, namely, upon Christ and the Church. That is the reason why those observances became vain. Not because the Apostle should try to put them aside as harmful, but because he wants us to condemn them as superfluous, such that were a Jew to come to belief in Christ, one would not, so as not to offend his fellows, bar him from remaining within the fold of those superfluities; however, one would equally not allow him to think that salvation was to be found in those same superfluities. For it is not the signs but their meaning that leads to the life of salvation.⁶¹

Augustine refers to the statements of Paul in the first Epistle to the Corinthians (7:18–19), but what he says here about circumcision covers a much wider field, enfolding all the observances of the Law. Those observances were appropriate in their day, but now they are vain and superfluous. They were but the symbols of the belonging to one particular people. Now, when the reality that they announced and figured has been accomplished, they have become like the shadow that has been replaced by light. We shall see that Augustine applies the same logic to the link of the Jewish People with its Land. A similar expression of this same reasoning is to be found when he ponders the Sabbath.

3. The Sabbath as Shadow and Figure

Sifting through many other texts, we find again in the *Contra Adimantum* two passages on the meaning of the Sabbath where Augustine mobilizes the same structure of thought according to which past and present, flesh and spirit, are absolutely parallel:

The Jews did not understand the observances of the Sabbath. They thought that one had to abstain even from those deeds necessary to human life. The Lord spoke to them through the marvellous parables of the ox that fell in the well, and of the cattle that had to be separated in order to lead it to the water. The Christians have not rejected the Sabbath, but they have understood it in such a manner that, while ceasing to observe it on its own carnal level, they have kept it in its spiritual sense, because they understand the word of God calling to rest and saying (Mt. 11:28–30): “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take upon yourselves my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble at heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my load is light.”

It is this Sabbath, i.e., this rest, that the Scriptures signify. But the Jews did not understand it, and in the organization of their lives they followed on the carnal level the shadow whose body, i.e., the truth, we should have been given. And, just as there was God’s rest after the Creation, we shall also obtain the rest that we have been promised, when we have done our deeds in our age — provided they are just. And that stage will simultaneously be the seventh and the last part of the age, which it would be too long to discuss here.

We can state, therefore, that the Lord has not abrogated the Old Testament, but He forces us to understand it properly. He did not abolish the Sabbath in order to destroy what it stood for; rather, He has unveiled it so that it should show what it kept hidden.⁶²

61. *Contra Adimantum* XVI, 2.

62. *Contra Adimantum* II, 2.

Thus the actual meaning of the Sabbath — good in its own terms — has definitely changed. Or better still, its true significance has been revealed in the New Testament. The Jews observe it but do not understand it because their observance is carnal. It is the Christians who truly observe it.

At this point circumcision and the Sabbath become typical elements of that change in the economy brought about by Christ, so much so that Augustine wraps them together in only one approach, applying to both the same logic of opposition. We can find an example in the same polemic with Adimantus:

On the other hand, the text of the Apostle, “You keep the days, the Sabbaths, the feasts and the years! I fear for you that I labored in vain among you.” (Rom. 1:25), does not seem to be as Adimantus cites it. Indeed, the Apostle does not speak of the Sabbath, but writes: “You keep the days, the years, the times! I fear for you that I labored in vain among you.” However, let us admit that indeed the issue is the Sabbath; do we not say, as well, that one must not observe those practices but rather respect what they **mean**? The Jews, in fact, observe them like servants, they do not understand their meaning and their prophetic character, and it is precisely this attitude that draws the reproach of the Apostle upon them, just as it is applied equally to all those who serve the creatures rather than the Creator. We, too, celebrate solemnly the day of the Lord and Easter, and all the other Christian feasts. However, because we understand that to which they relate, we, in fact, do not respect the times but their meaning.

The Manicheans fault our conduct, as if they themselves did ignore the days and the times. But when we enquire as to the opinion of their sect, all their explanations try to indicate that they do not respect **times themselves** but those things of which the times are the signs. Elsewhere, we have already shown that those things are fables and lies. What I add to that now tries to force them to admit, in their own words, that one can observe those practices in a manner consonant with reason, and in consequence, that circumcision was clearly and simultaneously imposed justly on the slaves and understood rightly by free men.

Therefore, with the Apostle we also reject the carnal circumcision, and with him we approve the spiritual one. We do not observe the Sabbath rest in terms of the times, but we understand it as being a temporal sign, and we orient our spirit toward the eternal kingdom that it signifies. With the Apostle as well we reject the observation of the times, and with him we guard the intelligence of the temporal signs. We maintain that the difference between the two Testaments derives from the fact that one contains the burdens imposed upon the slaves, the other the glory of free men — and that because one of the Testaments presents the prefiguration of our heritage, the other actually gives us that heritage. The Apostle interprets the Sabbath when he writes to the Hebrews: “There remains one day of rest reserved to the People of God” (Heb. 4:9). Similarly, he interprets circumcision when he says that Abraham “received the sign of circumcision as the seal of justification obtained through faith” (Rom. 4:11).

I do not drift away from the spiritual interpretation of the Apostle. I reject, by means of freedom, the carnal observance that is typical of servants, and I worship as the author of both Testaments the God who imposed upon the man trying to escape Him a law of fear; and the same God who, like a father, opened to the new man that returned to Him a law of love.⁶³

In this text we find the same series of oppositions lined up according to the same rule of fundamental dichotomy: symbol and reality, flesh and spirit,

63. *Contra Adimantum* XVI, 3.

temporal and eternal, slavery and freedom, old man and new man. By means of these opposing pairs of notions, Augustine expresses his faith in the radical novelty introduced by Jesus Christ, a novelty which Augustine himself experienced in his own conversion. The theological language of the Gospel of John, with its insistence on the opposition between above and below, life and death, darkness and light, confirms in other passages of Augustine what the latter receives here from Paul.

Certainly in the eyes of the believer Christ is light and truth and finally accomplishes what before him was only preparation and figure. Those pairs of notions express in a systematic manner the passage from one stage to another in the economy of salvation. However, when confronted with Augustine's daring use of them, one is led to ask if, irrespective of their theoretical significance, such an application of those dichotomies does not entail the risk of a certain oversimplification made all the more pronounced by the automatism of a univocal and generalized treatment.

Such in fact was the question we encountered when we dealt with Augustine's treatment of the passage from the Old to the New Testament, and with the specifically religious value of Jewish existence regarded on its own. We face it again here on the subject of the value of the *realia* that the Jewish People had received as a gift, which formed the framework and the condition of its fidelity to God, and which in addition contributed to defining the Jews' identity. The Land is one such reality. We shall see that, in Augustine, thinking on the link between the Jewish People and their Land bears the mark of this dualist structure, the permanent presence of which we have emphasized.

4. Land of Israel and City of God

Having revealed this avenue of thought and the categories implied therein, let us leaf through Augustine's great work, the *City of God*, so as to contemplate the history of salvation in the great fresco that he sketches starting from book XV. We shall see in what terms he presents the reality of the earthly city of Israel in the history of the Jewish People.

At the beginning of book XV, Augustine recalls the general theme of the whole work, namely the struggle between the two "cities," man's and God's. It is interesting to point out that these two cities are represented here by Cain and Abel, and that the contrast between them is used by Augustine to relativize the existence of the earthly city from the outset:

Cain was the firstborn of the two parents of the human species; he belongs to the City of Men. Abel, the second son, belongs to the City of God (Gen. 4:1-2).

And, in the case of a lone man, we take note of what the Apostle says (1 Cor. 15:46): "The spiritual is not what comes first, but the animal and then the spiritual." Each man coming from a condemned bed must first be born in Adam, bad and carnal: and if later, upon being born again in Christ, he has progressed along the good way, he will become good and spiritual. It is likewise when dealing with the human species as a whole. When, because of births and deaths, the two cities started to develop, the first was born a citizen of this age, the following one a stranger in this age and a member of the City of God, chosen and predestined, here below a stranger on account of grace, a citizen there above on account of grace.

It does not follow that every bad man will be transformed into a good man. But no one will become good unless bad before; and the sooner one betters one's self, the sooner as well one will be known for what one acquires, while covering the old name with the new.

It is written of Cain that he founded a city (Gen. 4:17), while Abel, being the stranger, did not found one. For the city of the saints is in heaven, even if it breeds here on earth citizens in whom it lives — as if abroad — till the time comes of its reign. At that moment it will gather all those born anew, in their bodies, and they will receive the promised kingdom where they will be sovereign to the end of time with their leader, the king of the ages.⁶⁴

Immediately upon reading this introduction, our attention is awakened because Augustine passes from one dichotomy to another, to the point of superimposing them. Cain and Abel are opposed like good and evil, then like the established city and the freedom of the pilgrim, and finally like the earthly city and the city of the saints — this last presented in its spiritual, transcendental and eternal value.

Augustine develops the comparison according to the same structure of thought. He now discovers the opposition between the two cities in their two meanings, or the two realizations of Jerusalem, earthly and heavenly. It is enough for Augustine to recall and comment upon the comparison proposed by Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians (4:21–5:1):

Certainly it was a shadow and a prophetic image of that city, meant to figure it rather than show it, that lived as a slave on earth at the time when it had to reveal itself. "Holy City" it was also called, as a symbol and not as a patent truth that must be realized one day.

Of the slave city, and of the free city of which the former is the image, the Apostle says in his Epistle to the Galatians: "Tell me, you who want to be under the Law, do you not listen to the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one from the slave, the other from the free woman. But the son of the slave was according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was according to the promise. These are allegorical: the two women are indeed two covenants. One from Mount Sinai gives birth to servitude. That is Hagar; and Sinai is in fact a mountain of Arabia. It corresponds to the present Jerusalem, which is enslaved with its children. But the heavenly Jerusalem is free, which is our mother. For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren one, you who do not bear; cry in happiness, you who do not know the pains of childbirth; for the children of the forsaken woman outnumber those of the one who has a husband' (Is. 54:1). As for us, my brethren, we are the children of the promise, like Isaac. And just as then the child according to the flesh persecuted the child according to the spirit, so again at present. As the Scripture says, 'Cast out the slave and her child, for the child of the slave will not inherit together with the child of the free woman' (Gen. 21:10). Therefore, brethren, we are the children not of the slave but of the free woman, for which freedom Christ has freed us."⁶⁵

This text is interesting on various levels. First of all because, as in the preceding paragraph, the reality of the earthly city is radically relativized to the advantage of the spiritual and heavenly city; what counts is the freed Jerusalem, which stands above and beyond all temporal and carnal realization. Further-

64. *City of God* XV, 1.

65. *City of God* XV, 2.

more, as we have seen elsewhere in another context,⁶⁶ Augustine sees in the opposition between Hagar and Sarah the figure of the opposition between Jews and Christians, children of the slave and children of the free woman. This is a point that we shall have to recall. Finally, even if Augustine insists here on the allegory of the two cities, its context nonetheless evokes the promise made to Abraham. Before any allegory about his descendants, and whatever the value of Paul's interpretation, Abraham was the beneficiary of a divine promise which assured him of the possession of a land. What has become of the context of that promise? Augustine deals with that at length in book XVI:

Let us now examine God's promises to Abraham. It is in them that there appear more clearly the oracles of God — that is to say, the true God — about the people of saints already foretold by the authority of the prophets. Here is the first promise (Gen. 12:1-3): "The Lord told Abraham: leave your country, your family, the house of your father, and go to the land that I shall show you; and I shall make you a great people, and I shall bless you, and I shall make your name glorious; and you will be blessed and I shall bless those who bless you, and I shall curse those who curse you, and in you will be blessed all the tribes of the earth." Let us note two things promised to Abraham. One, that his race will possess the Land of Canaan, as stated by the following words: "Go to the land that I shall show you; and I shall make you a great people." The other, much more important, referring not to the carnal race but rather to the spiritual race, does not make of Abraham the father of the sole People of Israel, but of all nations that follow in his footsteps and imitate his faith. That, in fact, is the beginning of the promise stated in these words: "and in you will be blessed all the tribes of the earth."⁶⁷

Even at a first reading, what is striking in this text is the fact that the actual content of the promise, as spelled out in the Genesis, lends itself to the dichotomous structure we have identified so often. In fact, the promise to Abraham holds a double dimension. One is eminently earthly: God gives Abraham a land, Canaan, for him to settle there with his children. The other is spiritual and includes from the outset a universal extension: "in you will be blessed all the tribes of the earth."

It is important to stress here that Augustine — regardless of his tendency to emphasize the spiritual or the allegorical and thus appease the Neoplatonic rhetorician within him — recognizes without reticence the realistic and concrete character of the right, accorded to the carnal race of Abraham, of occupying a territory. He even insists on noting the reality of that earthly and particular dimension of the promise, as opposed to the other more spiritual and more universal aspect:

Abraham therefore left Haran in his seventy-fifth year, the year one hundred and forty-five of his father, and he departed with Lot, the son of his brother, and Sarah his wife, to the Land of Canaan. He came to Sechem where for the second time he received a divine oracle. The Scriptures say (Gen. 12:7): "The Lord appeared to Abraham and spoke to him: 'I shall give this land to your seed.'" The reference here is not to that seed that made Abraham the father of

66. In my *Rencontres avec le judaïsme en Israël* (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 17, notes 24 and 25.

67. *City of God* XVI, 16.

all the peoples, but only to that seed that made him the father only of the People of Israel, for it is this one that will possess the Land of Canaan.⁶⁸

Through a magnanimous extrapolation, Augustine binds together in one perspective the two dimensions of the promise: the gift of a land, the opening to all the nations. However the extension of the gift to all the earth rests upon the certitude that the Land of Canaan was given to Israel:

Certainly that multitude promised to Abraham is not too numerous for God, but for men. For Him, not even the grains of dust of the earth are too numerous. And since not only the People of Israel, but also the whole of Abraham's seed — in which is to be found the promise of many children not according to the flesh but according to the spirit — most aptly embodies the comparison of the dust (Gen. 13:16–17), we may understand here that the promise refers to both seeds. If we have said that this is not wholly clear, it is because the actual multitude of that one people, born of Abraham according to the flesh through his grandson Jacob, has multiplied to the point of filling almost all the earth. It too, therefore, could be compared hyperbolically to the many grains of dust because it already could not be counted by man.

As for the land, there is no doubt that the reference is to Canaan, but the words "I shall give it to you and to your seed to the end of the age" (Gen. 13:15) can trouble some spirits if they take "to the end of the age" to signify "for eternity." If, however, conversely, they take "the end of the age" to mean, as faith teaches us, the end of this age, which also marks the start of the future age, then nothing will trouble them. In fact, the Israelites, although expelled from Jerusalem, remain in the other cities of the Land of Canaan, and will remain until the end. And now that all that land is peopled by Christians, still the seed itself is Abraham's.⁶⁹

Having said so much, we must now point out that Augustine, while acknowledging the specific value of Abraham's seed according to the flesh, as well as the link with a land involved in that carnal and earthly reality, introduces anew in the very identity of Jacob who becomes Israel that dichotomy which he employs so often. That, indeed, is the interpretation that he gives to Jacob's fight with the angel:

As I have just said, Jacob was also called Israel — the name preferred by the people who descended from him. That name had been imposed upon him by the angel that fought with him upon his return from Mesopotamia (Gen. 32:29), and that, in turn, is an evident figure of Christ. The victory of Jacob over the angel — a victory that the latter had desired in order to prefigure a mystery — is the symbol of Christ's passion in which the Jews had an apparent victory over him. Nonetheless, Jacob asks a blessing from the angel whom he had defeated, and thus the imposition of this name was a blessing. Israel means "who sees God," and that finally will be the reward of all the saints. Now the angel touched his apparent victor on the wide part of the thigh, which made him limp. Jacob himself, therefore, was simultaneously blessed and limping: blessed in those of his people who believed in Christ, limping in those who did not believe. Because the wide part of the thigh means the great number of his descendants. Among the latter, there are many of whom prophetically the psalmist said (Ps. 18:46, Septuagint): "They limped away from your paths."⁷⁰

68. *City of God* XVI, 18.

69. *City of God* XVI, 21.

70. *City of God* XVI, 39.

We see, therefore, that Jacob is blessed in his faithful seed, while limping in his unfaithful one — the latter according to the flesh, the former according to the spirit. Augustine indicates in passing that the patriarch returns from Mesopotamia and therefore enters the Promised Land. We might expect Augustine at this point to state the precise nature of the link between Jacob and that land, but he does nothing of the kind. Once again, Augustine returns to his dualist structure and stresses an analogy between two parallel pairs: the two aspects of Jacob, the two sons of Joseph, Esau and Jacob himself, all of them in sequence announce the same fundamental opposition between Jews and Christians:

Therefore, the two sons of Isaac, Esau and Jacob, were the image of two peoples, the Jews and the Christians, though in fact, regarding the carnal affiliation, the Jews do not descend from Esau, but rather the Idumeans — just as the Christians nations do not descend from Jacob, but rather the Jews, since the image would be senseless apart from the saying (Gen. 25:23): “the elder will be the servant of the younger.”

Similarly regarding the two sons of Joseph: the elder is the figure of the Jews, the younger of the Christians. When Isaac blesses them laying his right hand over the younger, who was at his left, and his left hand over the elder, who was at his right, that looked improper to their father, who drew Jacob’s attention as if to correct his error and to tell him which was the elder of the two. But he refused to move his hand and said (Gen. 48:19): “I know, my son, I know. He will be a people and will be exalted; while his younger brother will be greater, and his seed will become a multitude of nations.” Here again we come across the two great promises: because one will become a people, the other a multitude of nations. What could be more evident than these two promises, which enfold both the People of Israel and the whole world in Abraham’s race, the one according to the flesh, the other according to faith?⁷¹

One will note that in this passage Augustine appears to be somewhat embarrassed. Indeed, he admits his embarrassment and concedes that he is using an allegory. In order to save the coherence of his system, Augustine is here forced to distort somehow the obvious meaning of the text. *Auctoritas habet nasum caereum!* If the pair Esau–Jacob must mean the opposition between Jews and Christians, one must bind the Christians to Jacob and the Jews to Esau. However, that is not the reality of things, because from Esau descend the Idumeans. And, because that statement would not stand up to the test, Augustine forces the symbols to some extent. The purpose of his effort, in fact, is to state that if the seed of Jacob according to the flesh is the Jews, it is Christ who is the accomplishment and heir according to the spirit. Regardless of the procedure, what matters here is the sense of that dichotomy which Augustine tries, cost what it may, to apply in order to guarantee the coherence of the synthesis. The latter, confirmed by the allegory, is simple. We find in it again the same fundamental dualism: Esau, the elder, stands for the Jews, a singular people according to the flesh; Jacob, the younger, stands for the Christians, a multitude of nations according to the spirit. Both descend from Abraham, but on two radically different levels. The multitude of nations, the seed according to the spirit, the extension of the People of God to the whole universe, is no longer bound to one particular territory.

71. *City of God* XVI, 42.

This double dimension of the promise, with its accompanying duality in terms of the levels of realization, is confirmed by Augustine in book XVII of the *City of God*. There he insists openly on the primacy of the seed according to the spirit; what he says about the link to the Land regarding the seed according to the flesh thereby gains an even greater stress and importance:

In the preceding book we have said that God, from the beginning, had made two promises to Abraham. One that his seed would possess the Land of Canaan, as it is written: "Go to the land that I shall show you; and I shall make you a great people." The other, much more important, regarding not his carnal but rather his spiritual seed, which makes him the father not solely of the People of Israel but of all the nations that tread in his footsteps in faith. It is thus made to him: "In you will be blessed all the tribes of the earth." We have shown that many events had stood witness to those two promises.

Abraham's seed, i.e., the People of Israel according to the flesh, already occupied the Land of the Promise. Having conquered the enemy cities, and having settled therein, it had started to develop its own authority to the point of anointing kings. Thus a great part of the divine promises to that people became reality: those made to the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and others during their days, as well as those made to Moses, who delivered that people from slavery in Egypt and through whom, when he guided it in the desert, all the events of the past had become reality. Undoubtedly the illustrious leader, Joshua the Prophet, introduced the Hebrew People into the Promised Land, and after having defeated the nations he divided it before his death among the twelve tribes according to God's order. However, not in Moses' time, nor during the whole period of the Judges, could the divine promise regarding the Land of Canaan from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates come to fruition. Nothing more had been prophesied about that, and the event was still expected. It was accomplished by David and his son Solomon, whose kingdom grew to the promised proportions. In fact, they conquered all the peoples and made them tributaries.

Under these kings, therefore, Abraham's posterity settled the Land of Promise according to the flesh, the Land of Canaan. Only one thing was missing to that fulfillment of God's earthly promise: as for its temporal prosperity, the Hebrew People had to remain in that land, in virtue of the succession of his seed in an unshakeable reign, to the end of that perishable age, but on condition that it should obey the laws of the Lord its God. But God, knowing that the condition would not be obeyed, made use of temporal punishments to test it in the small number of its faithful, and to warn those among all nations who subsequently would remain loyal to Him, as befitted the heirs of the second promise to be fulfilled through the incarnation of Christ, upon the revelation of the new Covenant.⁷²

This text is particularly rich on two levels. First, Augustine recalls here the two dimensions of the promise. Second, he shows how both are rooted in God's design and how the one is subordinate to the other. Indeed, if the universality of Abraham's seed is directly linked to the spiritual fulfillment of the kingdom, the promise of the Land is a carnal gift, subject to the vicissitudes of time and history. These two dimensions of the promise are not placed upon one and the same level and do not become reality according to one and the same regime. Nonetheless, the condition of the one and of the other is to be found in the fidelity to God's call, while within this perspective the one is given in view of the other.

72. *City of God* XVII, 2.

Here Augustine hints at an intuition that he mentions as if in passing. In fact, that intuition would require a very delicate elaboration; what we shall retain of it for our present purpose is the idea that the temporal fulfillment of the promise depends on Israel's observance of the precepts. Perhaps, without a clear conscious knowledge, Augustine convalidates that Jewish consciousness which links the return to the Land and the dwelling in Zion to fidelity to the Law. On the one hand, God foresaw Israel's infidelities; on the other, He conceived the troubles of its history in terms of tests or acts of purification in view of its universal role. The settlement by Israel of the Promised Land appears here as linked to the identity and vocation of Israel. This is confirmed by the manner in which Augustine introduces here the role played by David and Solomon in the creation and organization of the earthly kingdom. He comments positively and without reserve on the reality of the link between the People of Israel and Jerusalem — even if in its earthly character that reality announces another fulfillment to come.

Indeed, a little further on in the same book, Augustine returns to the double dimension of that temporal fulfillment. The kingdom and the Temple, the reality of which he recognizes at the level of the history of the People of Israel in carnal terms, both have a symbolic and figurative value as regards their accomplishment in Jesus Christ:

That is what David had understood when, in the second book of Kings, from which we have somewhat digressed in order to explain this Psalm, he said (2 Sam. 7:19): "You have spoken in favor of the house of Your servant for a time remote." And he adds further down (v. 29): "Start now and bless for always the house of Your servant," and what follows. Because he was to generate a son whose lineage was to reach Christ, thanks to whom his house was to be eternal together with the house of God; the house of David, indeed, because of David's race; the house of God, simultaneously, because of the temple of God, made of men and not of stones, where the people will dwell for eternity with its God and in its God, God with His people and in His people. Thus God will fill His people and His people will be filled with God when God will be all in all; He is the reward in peace, he who is strength in war.

That is why to the words of Nathan (v. 11), "The Lord will announce to you that you will build a house for Him," the reply is provided by these words of David (v. 27): "Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have opened the ears of your servant saying, 'I shall build you a house.'" That is the house that we build ourselves when we live well, and God as well, when he helps us to live well; for "if the Lord does not build the house, those who build it labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1). And when the supreme dedication of that house comes, then what God says through Nathan's mouth will become reality (vv. 10–11): "And I will assign a place for Israel my people, and I will grow them roots, and they will live apart and will have trouble no more; and the son of iniquity will not dare to humiliate them as in the days of old, when I sat judges over my people Israel."⁷³

Here we can see the simultaneous action of the two dimensions of the promise. On the one hand, the carnal seed of David, linked to the stone temple. On the other, the figure of Christ linked to the announcement of a spiritual temple. Both these dimensions converge on Jesus Christ, who is David's heir according to the flesh and the final accomplishment of the figure. Being the

73. *City of God* XVII, 12.

announcement of the Church to come, the People of Israel and its Temple have an earthly basis; but their reality disappears once the prophecy of which it is the bearer is fulfilled in Christ and in the Church. Israel of the flesh is effaced by the Israel of God. The earthly Jerusalem gives way to the Church, which is the beginning in time of the heavenly Jerusalem.

From such a perspective, what becomes of the link between the People of Israel and its Land after the Advent of Christ? Is it even possible to find in Augustine a reply to this question, since in his view of things the very question seems no longer to have any point?

5. The Two Israels According to Augustine

What is the link between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel? In order to reply to this question, or to explain its absence, it will be enough to collect in a brief synthesis all the elements that we have gleaned in the course of our enquiry. In fact, Augustine's thought on the matter seems to be as coherent as it is simple.

Briefly, there are two Israels, two Jerusalems, two seeds from Abraham and Jacob. In each of these pairs, the first term indicates a reality of the flesh, the second a reality of the spirit; the one is a figure, the second a definitive fulfillment; the first is earthly, the second is heavenly. However, while positing this opposition as a rupture, Augustine preserves a certain continuity as well, as he presents the first term as a prophecy and the second as its fulfillment. Here again, regarding the People of Israel and its "place," its country and its land, we encounter the same paradoxical structure of opposition and continuity that we identified when we examined the relationship in Augustine between the Old and New Testaments.

If we consider now the personalities of this holy history, the unfolding of which took place on two levels, we notice that Abraham, Jacob, David and the other actors of the destiny of Israel were engaged in a very human adventure; that they belonged to a singular people; that they lived in a land that was, on the part of God, the object of a special promise. Considering all the above factors, Augustine acknowledges a concrete and realistic existence to the Land of Israel and to the city of Jerusalem. Nonetheless, that Jewish reality was only a passing phenomenon and, above all, its mode of implementation was only carnal. Now it became superfluous after the complete fulfillment. The sole existence of those realities — land, kingdom, city, country, temple — was to be found in the fact that they were the matter of a symbol, a sacramental sign, the figure of a heavenly reality, the announcement of an eternal kingdom, of a people extended over the whole universe and including, in its unity, all the nations.

A passage from the small treatise *De Doctrina Christiana* sums up very clearly this synthesis of Augustine. In it he comments on the prophecy of the small remnant ("If the number of the children of Israel is like the sand of the sea, only a small remnant will be saved" — Is. 10:22), according to the opposition voiced by Ezekiel (36:28–29) and used again by Paul (2 Cor. 3:23), in which again we find the contrast: hearts of stone and hearts of flesh. Augustine then

develops his parallel by means of a confrontation between Israel of the flesh and Israel of the spirit:

Thus Israel of the spirit is composed not of one nation only, but of all nations, for they were promised to our fathers, in their descendent who is Christ.

Therefore, the Israel of the spirit stands apart from the Israel of the flesh, which comprises only one nation, not because of the nobility of the country but because of the novelty of grace; not because of the race, but because of the spirit. However, when from the height of his vision the prophet speaks of the second Israel, or to the second Israel, it is as if he also tried to slip, unnoticed, to the first; and when he speaks of the first or to the first, he appears to be addressing the second or to be speaking of it. In other words, he does not constrain the intelligence of the Scriptures as if he were an enemy, but like a physician he puts it to the test.

Further on the prophet says, "I shall lead you back to your land" (Ez. 36:25), followed by the almost exact repetition, "And you will inhabit the land that I have given to your fathers" (36:28). We are not supposed to understand the above in a carnal sense, as if they applied to the Israel of the flesh, but in a spiritual sense, indicating the Israel of the spirit. For the Church, without blemishes, is formed by the gathering of all the nations and is destined to reign forever with Christ, who is "the land of the blessed and of the living" (Ps. 26:13). Thus it is **this** land that we have to understand as having been "given to our fathers," since it was promised to them by the certain and stable will of God. In fact it was already given to them by the firmness itself of the promise, or better still, of the predestination, irrespective of the fact that the fathers thought that it would be given to them in their own time. Again, it means as well that grace conferred upon the saints, as we read in the words written by the Apostle to Timothy: "God called upon us not because of our deeds, but because of His own decree and because of the grace that we received in Jesus Christ before the beginning of the centuries, and which has become apparent now through the appearance of our Savior" (2 Tim. 1:9-10).

He said that the grace had been granted at a time when its beneficiaries did not yet exist. That is so because in the plan of divine predestination, what was to take place in its own time and "has become apparent," in the words of the Apostle, was already an accomplished fact. Nonetheless, the words of Ezekiel could also be understood as related to the land of the coming age, when "there will be a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1), where the unjust would not be allowed to live. Thus again it was said with good reason to the pious men that that land is theirs (Mat. 5:5), and that none of its parts will belong to the impious. **For it was also given to the pious men, as was grace, at the moment when it was decreed that it would have been given to them.**⁷⁴

That extension of the People of God and of the Holy City beyond the limits of Israel itself on the carnal level had already taken place during the times of the people of the Bible, for holy men, like Job, belonged already to the heavenly Jerusalem — despite the fact that, not being Jewish, they were strangers to the earthly Israel.⁷⁵ Moreover, the same can be said about Paul, who was closer to his Jewish brethren in respect of being a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, than in respect of belonging to their nation according to the flesh: "Is it not so, that Saint Paul himself was a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem — or was he not so even more truly when he experienced, facing the Israelites, his brethren

74. *De Doct. Christ.* III, 39, 49.

75. *De Peccat. Merit. et Remiss.* II, 11; *Enarr. in Ps.* CXXXII, 5.

in the flesh, great sadness and endless pain in his heart?"⁷⁶ Thus the citizenship of the heavenly country transcends and absorbs the citizenship of the earthly country, which was the announcement of the former. So it is for Augustine with the territory of the country where this belonging is inscribed.

The synthesis is as clear as the symmetry of the terms is simple. Israel was the object of a double promise. In its earthly and carnal dimension, Israel was given a land: the land where the patriarchs and the kings found their incontestable country. Without slipping into black humor, we could say that on this issue Augustine has accepted and indeed justified a Zionism of the Old Testament. However, on the level of another dimension, spiritual and more far-reaching, another lineage had been announced to Israel, way beyond the limits of the flesh. This other Israel, extending over the whole of the universe and already living in eternity, has no need for an earthly land for its country is in heaven. If, in the course of human history across time, it was necessary to grant it a land, this would be the whole earth, including all nations, and the whole earth should be considered its domain.

IV. Questions to Augustine

If Augustine's synthesis appears to be harmonious, is it not far too simple? Faced with the rigorous parallelism of all the distinctions that Augustine finds in the Scriptures, and which he utilizes systematically, we have no choice but to feel a sort of malaise, a sentiment of dissatisfaction. The perfection of this typological frame, is it not too rigorous? Does it not risk ignoring important elements of a reality too mysterious and too complex to be grasped through the interplay of such simplistic categories?

As presented by Augustine, this difference of regime between the **before** and the **after**, on the one hand, and between **flesh** and **spirit**, on the other, would be enough to raise a few questions. Even if one considers the Church as the new country for every human being, extending to the whole universe, what will become of the citizenship and the earthly country of its members? And more accurately, considering that the Church is Augustine's true Israel, but that the Jews in fact still exist, what is their place among the nations? In particular, what country is their country, in what landscape do they find their land? These questions grow in complexity, and the replies will demand even more attention if one recalls — and Augustine does it often — that the earthly reality of Israel according to the flesh is the announcement and the figure of the new people, realized in Christ.

In short are there not, in the synthesis, the harmonious rigor of which we have just observed, some contradictions, or at least some parallel statements that we cannot reconcile with one another? Or more bluntly, is that system of references capable of enveloping the whole of reality?

These are the questions that I should like to ask Augustine, with all the reverence that Thomas Aquinas showed when he did not hesitate to criticize or to interpret, in an unforeseen manner, the sentences of the Doctor of Hippo.

76. *City of God* XX, 17; cf. *Epist.* XL, 6, LXXIV, 4 and LXXXII, 29.

1. Oscillations Between the Two Approaches

Irrespective of the rigor of the dualism whose main thrust has been described, it would be a mistake to regard the dichotomies listed earlier as universally and unilaterally pejorative toward the Jewish People. What strikes us in Augustine's work, as in that of other Church Fathers, is a kind of oscillation between two readings of the Old Testament and, correspondingly, between two interpretations of Judaism. One is **positive**, emphasizing the notion that the Old Testament **prefigures** what is found in the New; it implies the ascription of a definite, though relative, reality to those features of the Jewish People which serve to announce and prepare the Advent of Christ. The other is **negative**, stressing the notion of the **shadow**, in other words that everything in the history of Israel and in the Jewish condition, when related to Christ and to the Church, is portrayed as an imperfection, deprivation or absence of reality. Even if these two approaches are far from being equally represented, one has to register their coexistence, were it but to indicate a manner of interpretation more open to the positive aspects of Jewish reality.

In fact, Augustine does acknowledge the continuity of God's purpose and of the identity of a wisdom of life, of which the whole of the Bible carries the message. Both that continuity and that identity imply that the Old Testament is already pregnant with the values of the Gospel. It is in this spirit that, commenting on, for example, the Beatitudes and other parts of the Sermon on the Mount, Augustine insists on what we might call the biblical substrate of Jesus' doctrine.

Sometimes, too, Augustine presents the passage from the Old to the New Testament as a change of regime between two situations in which the first retains, nonetheless, a positive value, as we can read in a passage from the *Contra Faustum*:

Order desired that the times be so disposed and distributed that **at the very first it would appear that earthly possessions ... derive only from the power and the decision of the only true God**. That is why the Old Testament enfolded earthly promises and covered in a kind of deep shadow the secret of the Kingdom of Heaven, which would be revealed at the appropriate time. But when the plenitude of times came, it became necessary, in order to reveal the New Testament lying hidden under the figures of the Old, to bear witness that **there was another life, in view of which one had to disdain the present life, another kingdom, in view of which one must tolerate, in patience, the hostility of all earthly kingdoms**. Thus on the one hand the patriarchs and the prophets have reigned here below in order to show that it is God who gives and removes empires. And on the other the apostles and the martyrs have not reigned here below, so as to show that one must desire above all the Kingdom of Heaven. The former, being kings, **made wars**, so as to prove that God even dispenses such victories. The latter **let themselves be killed** without resistance, so as to teach that the most beautiful victory is to die for faith and truth.⁷⁷

Faithful to his general vision, Augustine here contrasts the Old and New Testaments, like shadow and light, figure and reality. Nonetheless, he acknowledges

77. *Contra Faustum* XXII, 76.

the positive content of a certain logic of earthly things, which is indeed meant to announce a heavenly logic, yet allows earthly and temporal things to retain their own existence. From such a perspective, the realities of this world such as the nation, the people, the kingdom and even the wars and victories of the patriarchs and the kings have, in their human and carnal dimension, a value sanctioned by Him who is the Master of History.

But beware! Whatever existence Augustine grants to those temporal realities, whatever the seriousness of those promises of God that they announce, Augustine's main statement is that everything found in the Old Testament was merely a carnal figure of the heavenly realities brought by the New. Another passage from *Contra Faustum* reveals clearly this switch from the temporal reality of the events of old to the prophecy of the events to come, as the existence of earthly things fades into the figure of heavenly realities:

That the promises of the temporal realities are enclosed in the Old Testament, and precisely this is the reason for its name, and that the promises of eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven derive from the New Testament, no one among us doubts. But that in those temporal things there were enclosed the figures of future events, which took place in us, coming at the end of times, is not an invention of mine; it is rather the thought of the Apostle... Not only the literature but also the **life** of the carnal people was prophetic.⁷⁸

Certainly the *realia* of Israel's history are not denied; they are placed in a context of relative values, in relation to those realities that alone have a definitive existence. It is as if the existence of the ancient realities dissolved in the transparency of the figure.

As we could acknowledge on several occasions, it is clearly this second viewpoint that Augustine most frequently stressed. The text where the blurring of the *realia* of Israel's history most characteristically comes to the fore, when faced with the novelty of the final accomplishment, is undoubtedly a passage in the *Tractatus in Joannem*. Here Augustine explains the two manners in which the words of Psalm 87:5 (Septuagint) — *Mater mea, Sion* — can be placed upon the lips of Jesus himself, provided one considers his human dimension. Of which country is Christ a citizen? Of which Zion is he a son? We shall see that the dichotomy stated in this text is indeed rigorous and implacable. It appears all the more severe when seen in its proper context. Applying the famous parable of the two olive trees — the wild and the cultured — proposed by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (11:17–24), Augustine shows that the true country of Abraham's descendants is no longer on this earth because it belongs already to the Kingdom of Heaven:

For it is so, that the proud branches are broken, the humble wild olive is grafted, but the roots remain irrespective of the breaking of the one and the insertion of the other. Where do the roots remain? In the patriarchs? Christ's country is, in fact, the People of Israel, because from it he was born in flesh; and the roots of that tree are formed by the holy patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And where are they? At rest, close to God, surrounded by such honors that this poor man, aided by God, is raised after his death up to Abraham's bosom, and that it is in Abraham's bosom that he is seen from afar by the proud rich man. The roots therefore remain; they are praised, while the

78. *Contra Faustum* IV, 2.

proud branches have deserved to be cut and dried, while the humble wild olive tree replaces them, when they have been cut.⁷⁹

The proud branches are excluded from that lineage and from that country, while the humble ones are invited to take their place therein even if, like the centurion in the Gospel (Mt. 8:5–13), they are foreigners to Israel according to the flesh, wild olive branches transplanted into the cultured tree:

That the natural branches were cut and the wild olive transplanted instead, learn it from the episode of the centurion, which I recalled so as to compare it to that of the royal official. "In truth I tell you," says the Lord, "I have not met such a great faith in Israel, and I tell you as well, many from east and west..." What a vast stretch of land did the wild olive occupy! This world was a forest of bitterness. But because of their humility, because they returned to the "I am not worthy that you dwell under my roof," "many from east and west will come." They will come, and what will be their lot? For, if they must come, it is because they have already been cut in the forest. Where will they be grafted, so that they do not dry? To what feast, in fear that they will not be invited, not to eternal life, but to much drink?⁸⁰

Thus Augustine praises and honors Abraham's spiritual seed; he acknowledges their having a dwelling or a country which, like the live and true olive, is extended over the whole world, whereas the unfaithful branches of the cultured olive are cut and disposed of outside the kingdom (Mt. 8:11f.):

"They will take their place with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Where? "In the Kingdom of Heaven." And what will become of those born from Abraham's stock? What will one do with those branches that grew so amply from the tree? They will be cut, so that others be grafted instead. Learn that they will be cut: "The sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness."⁸¹

The judgment is severe. This same harshness colors Augustine's comments on the two meanings that *Mater mea, Sion* can have, when pronounced by Jesus:

Let the prophet be honored in our midst, for he was not honored in his country. He received no honor in the country where he was created; let him receive honor in the country that he created. For in the former he who created all was himself created, he was created in the form of a servant. That city where he was created, that Zion, that Jewish People, that Jerusalem, he created them, when he was God's Word by the Father, for "through him all was made, and without him nothing was made."

This man, of whom we heard today, was "the unique mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ." About him the Psalm (87:5 Septuagint) had said: "A man will say, Mother Zion." A man, the man who is the mediator between God and men, says "Mother Zion." Why does he say "Mother Zion"? Because it is from her that he received his flesh, because it is from her that was born the Virgin Mary, in whose bosom he took the form of a servant and deigned to make himself known in the deepest humility. A man says, "Mother Zion," and that man who says "Mother Zion" was created in it, "he became man within her." Because prior to her he was God, and in her he became man. He who became man in her, is "himself, who founded it while being the highest," not the humblest. "In her he became man," and very humble, for "the Word became flesh and has lived among us," but "himself founded it while being the highest," because "at the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

79. *Tractatus in Joannem* XVI, 5.

80. *Tractatus in Joannem* XVI, 9.

81. *Tractatus in Joannem* XVI, 6.

with God, and the Word was God; through him all was made." And since he founded that country, let he receive there his honor. The country that gave him birth rejected him; let him be received by the country that he regenerated.⁸²

Christ himself is the key to the spiritual interpretation of that country which is Zion. More than that, he is also a stumbling block. On the carnal level he belongs to the earthly country of Zion, because he received his humanity from a daughter of that people. However, he stands above those human and carnal realities because, being the Word of God he is their creator. Furthermore, and mainly, being the Redeemer, he gave the true Zion its final fulfillment. The authentic Zion is the heavenly country, the eternal one where He is the Lord.

In this specific viewpoint, earthly Zion is given a radically relative value. One might have expected Augustine to halt here so as to acknowledge the human and carnal existence of that earthly country, the value of belonging to that nation, the dignity of the citizen of Zion. Instead, he immediately climbs one step further, to the evaluation of that spiritual and universal Zion of which Jesus, the Son of God, is the Savior. He also stresses that this nation, which did not recognize its Lord, is not worthy of receiving it. Now nothing more counts but the city of Zion regenerated by Christ.

2. A Breach in the System

Confronted with this approach of exclusion, one can ask what has become of that more open and dynamic approach which accorded to the history of Israel and to the realities of Judaism a value of announcement and of figure, while at the same time acknowledging their positive existence. Here the system appears to be excessively rigid or too narrow. Above all, it seems that it lacks one element in order adequately to embrace the complex reality of which we are speaking. There is a breach in the synthesis.

At the end of the text that we have quoted, and in most of the texts we have read and that become clearer through it, Augustine places two cities in opposition. On the one hand there is holy Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, God's kingdom, where all the saints saved by Christ are gathered, including in the first row the saints of the Old Testament who on account of their faith and open-heartedness were already a part of the New Testament. On the other hand, facing that vision of light, stands the Zion of our world, the earthly Jerusalem, City of Men. The difficulty stems from the fact that it is not easy to define clearly the true face of that city of flesh, because at times it is the positive reality that prefigures spiritual Jerusalem, at times the dark and negative fulfillment of the city of evil.

Are there merely two cities: the City of God and the City of the Devil, one spiritual, one carnal? Is there not an intermediate reality? What happens to this earthly city where men of flesh and blood live? We know that this question is one of the most difficult in the interpretation of the *City of God*. Extensively debated by the specialists, it remains an object of discussion.⁸³

82. *Tractatus in Joannem* XVI, 7.

83. G. Bardy's introduction to *La Cité de Dieu* (Paris, 1959), pp. 75–97; A. Luras and H. Rondet, *Le Thème des deux cités dans l'oeuvre de S. Augustin* (Paris, 1953), pp. 97–

It is clear that within the overall logic of the *City of God*, Augustine's vision of history allows for only two cities. On this point I am inclined to share the opinion of E. Meuthen⁸⁴ and of Henri Marrou.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, considering the precise subject of our discussion, namely the historical existence of the People of Israel and of its roots on earth, it appears that the tripartite distinctions proposed by H. Leisegang⁸⁶ and by Ch. Journet⁸⁷ apply very adequately.

Leisegang believes it is possible to discern in Augustine a *civitas Dei* in heaven, a *civitas terrena spiritualis*, that of Sarah and of Isaac, and a *civitas terrena carnalis*, that of Hagar and of Ishmael. Journet, in a simpler scheme, sees three cities: the City of God, the City of Men and the City of the Devil. The interest of Leisegang's classification is that it reinstates the difference between spirit and flesh at the very heart of the earthly city. Likewise Journet's classification is of interest because it invites us to see in the City of Men the terrain where both the City of God and the City of the Devil meet. Whatever the debate, the essential point to grasp is in fact the impact of the two opposed cities — God's and the Devil's — over the concrete destiny of the earthly city, in other words on the whole adventure of human history. And it is clear that this applies, in the first place, to the earthly Jerusalem and the adventure of Israel.

In point of fact, the confusion that gives rise to this debate and renders the problem particularly difficult is to be found in Augustine's thought itself. In it we find something of a disagreement between the fundamental dualism he expounds on the theoretical level, and the application he makes of it on the level of historical reality. We must try to analyze this disagreement with great care if we want to reveal what is lacking in Augustine's synthesis.

Seen close up, the dialectic mechanism of the typology used by Augustine reveals a univocal gliding from dichotomy to dichotomy, which ignores the specific importance of each and leads finally to a general structure of opposition where dualism may become dangerous. Upon reading again the texts that we have quoted, we notice that Augustine juxtaposes contrasts of terms and finally attributes to them the same value.

Using the Pythagorean model of a column of contrasts, all of which emanate from one basic opposition, we can display Augustine's contrasts as follows:

160; Y. Congar, "Civitas Dei et Ecclesia chez S. Augustin: histoire de la recherche, son état présent," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 3 (1957), 1–14.

84. E. Meuthen, "Der ethische Charakter der civitates bei Augustin und ihre platonische Fehldeutung," in *Aus Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Bonn, 1957), pp. 42–62.

85. H.I. Marrou, "La Théologie de l'histoire," in *Augustinus Magister* III (Paris, 1955).

86. H. Leisegang, "Der Ursprung der Lehre Augustins von der Civitas Dei," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 16 (1926), 127–158.

87. Ch. Journet, "La Cité humaine: les trois cités, celle de Dieu, celle de l'homme, celle du diable," *Nova et Vetera* 33 (1958), pp. 25–48; cf. H.I. Marrou, "Civitas Dei, civitas terrena, num tertium quid?" *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957), 342–350.

before	—	after
old	—	new
carnal	—	spiritual
figure	—	reality
earthly	—	heavenly
shadow	—	light
proud	—	humble
cupidity	—	charity
bad	—	good
Jew	—	Christian
Synagogue	—	Church
City of the Devil	—	City of God
Babylon	—	Jerusalem

Two facts stand out immediately on looking at this table. First, such a parallel arrangement abolishes any dynamic relation between opposing terms, while stressing only their contrary condition: thus the before and the after, the old and the new, stand to each other like the carnal and the spiritual. Or, even more crudely, as bad versus good. Second, all the terms listed on the left are given a negative connotation: carnal and earthly share the column with proud and bad. Such a synthesis suppresses, or at least dangerously blurs, the positive values of figure, announcement and preparation that are implied in some of the terms listed on the left.

It is clear, therefore, without yet speaking of Jews and Judaism, that this table manifests through the use of the parallelism — the simplicity of which should not deceive us — the dualistic character of Augustine's theology. It is equally clear that Augustine's thought bears the double mark of the experience of conversion and of the Neoplatonic — perhaps even Plotinian! — vision in which that dualistic experience found the framework for its conceptual expression. That is why we discern, in those pairs of ordered notions, the reflection of a very pessimistic vision of human nature not touched by grace. Man is a wounded creature, threatened by pride and sufficiency. The world is a *regio dissimilitudinis* from which one must free oneself. Carnal existence is marked by the original sin.

We shall not here go into the immense problem posed to the theologian by this original attitude of Augustine's spirituality. We shall only remark in the area of our problem that the pessimistic dualism applied to the realities of the Old Testament and Jewish existence such as the People, the Law, tradition, the Land, carries within itself the danger of a decidedly negative vision. As one can notice through the above table, there is the risk of introducing a kind of Manichean opposition. If the City of Man is on the side of the Devil, if the flesh is on the side of evil, then *a fortiori* the Jews and the earthly Jerusalem are on that same side as well. At the end of such a dialectical exercise, one will place the pair that opposes earthly Jerusalem and heavenly Jerusalem parallel with the pair that opposes Babylon and Jerusalem. Confronted with a Church in which the spiritual Jerusalem is accomplished, Israel and the Jews find themselves aligned with Babylon!

In order to show that the system has a fault, perhaps it is enough to remark that it leads to an internal contradiction. The value of Israel as announcement and figure disappears. The whole of the *realia*, although needed in order to create a typology, lose their reality. We are presented with a sacrament the matter of which is annulled or contested, with a symbolism the signs of which have no more existence of their own. Further, if the reality of the *realia* is not totally abolished, it is regarded as illusory and superfluous because it is temporal, and as marked by pride and sin because it is carnal.

In fact, with his very particular accent, derived jointly from his spiritual experience and his genius, Augustine is here the representative of a Platonism that left its mark on the theology of most of the Church Fathers. We shall better understand the internal drive of his position and gauge its limitations by putting it back within its general patristic frame.

3. Platonism and Salvation History in Patristic Theology

A general view of the tradition of the Church Fathers will let us discern the source of the misunderstandings that have distorted or hardened some of their views about Israel and Judaism. These views became classic positions of Christian theology in general and of Augustine's in particular.

Christian historians like Marcel Simon in his *Verus Israel*⁸⁸ and Edward Flannery in the vast fresco he sketched in *Anguish of the Jews*⁸⁹ have tried to stress the origins and development of what we can call the anti-Jewish scholastic approach that had so much influence on Christian exegesis and theology over the centuries. In particular, they have pointed to the very obscure and mysterious period between 70 and 135 A.D., i.e., from the destruction of the Temple to the dispersion that followed the final victory of the Roman armies in Judea. They have shown how the cruel clash between Synagogue and fledgling Church during that period hardened positions on both sides. From the end of the first century, Jews and Christians have to be defined in terms of mutual opposition. Rivalry between the Jewish and Christian communities was such that we can feel the tensions within the Church ever since the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). That rivalry persisted for a long time as a kind of obsession in the Church's fears regarding Judaizing Christians. Patristic conceptions of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments bore the imprint of that original conflict.

It is true, admittedly, that theologians like Justin Martyr and Tertullian strongly object to the extreme positions of Marcion or pseudo-Barnabas. Nonetheless, we notice in them, as also later in Gregory of Nyssa and Ambrose, that permanent oscillation which we have discovered in Augustine, between two ways of considering the history of salvation and the stages of revelation. Sometimes they insist on the continuity of God's design, sometimes they present the relationship between Israel and the Church as a dialectic of rupture and contradiction. Undoubtedly it is an inevitable oscillation, since we come across it in the New Testament. It already appears in Paul, where the accent in

88. Paris, 1948.

89. New York, 1965.

this respect is very different depending on whether we read the Epistle to the Galatians or the Epistle to the Ephesians, or even one or another chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

As one reads Augustine, as well as Justin and Tertullian, one cannot but notice three characteristics that appear to be held in common by the spiritual progression of the Church Fathers. First, their thought bears the mark of the road that led them toward truth: their theology is an account of conversion. Besides showing all the fervor of a conversion, it carries the risks of every transposition of a spiritual experience into objective categories. Parmenides and later Plato expressed in their philosophies the possible drawbacks of such a process: the ontological projection of an itinerary of conversion is inevitably dualistic. For one who has passed from darkness to light, from error to truth, from *regio dissimilitudinis* to eternal truths, there is an evident temptation to divide the world according to the metaphysical categories of a fundamental dualism.

The second characteristic of this kind of religious thought is its christocentrism. That is obvious, in fact, because we are dealing here with a conversion or an entry into a faith, and because Christ has appeared as the Master of Truth, the key to the understanding of the universe and history both personal and cosmic. The **before** is given meaning by the **after** or the **now**. Here the risk is to misplace the levels and the highlights, to be unable to distinguish between what we hold in view of faith and what we hold in view of reason. This distinction between philosophy and theology was far from being elaborated at the time when Tertullian or Augustine was writing. When Augustine in his theory of knowledge attributes to Christ, the Interior Master, the role of illumination, when in his moral stand he sees the virtues of the pagans as vices sullied by human presumption, he is expressing in decidedly Christian terms his experience as a convert and believer. It is up to the philosopher to understand that experience and extract its universal value.

The third feature that we detect in most of the Church Fathers, especially in the Apologists, is what they called *preparatio evangelica* — the “preparation for the Gospel.” As converts themselves, or on addressing new converts, when they tried to place themselves in their new status in relation to those philosophies to which they had subscribed, and they took pains to find in the pre-Christian wisdoms some “seeds of truth.” In fact, it is striking that according to this perspective the Old Testament and the pagan philosophies share equally, as previous stages, the value of being such a preparation. Moses was seen as the Jewish equivalent of what Plato was for the Greeks, while Plato was an “atticizing Moses.”

Conversion, christocentrism, *preparatio evangelica*. I have stressed these three features that appear to be characteristic of the spiritual attitude of the Church Fathers because the manner in which they played their role allows us to grasp that particular “gliding” which led to a pejorative vision of the Jewish People, in comparison not only with the Gospel and the Church, but also with paganism. Since the Jews rejected Christ, they were seen as lacking that christocentrism which alone could give the Old Testament its true meaning. From this perspective, the theme of conversion becomes a radical opposition between

the before and the after. In such an opposition, moreover, the regime of the Old Testament is seen as carnal and imperfect, one of the dark ages before the advent of light. It follows, however strange it may seem, that one may come to acknowledge more willingly a *preparatio evangelica* in the Greek poets or in the pagan philosophers than in the wisdom of the Bible.

In our days, the dualistic — indeed Manichean — attitude of the likes of Simone Weil allows us to understand this strange and paradoxical movement that has marked Christian thought. Daughter of Israel attracted to Christ but poised on the threshold of conversion, she was extremely severe when judging the past of the Jewish People as presented in the Bible. She was more willing to turn to the “Greek source” in order to discover in Plato or the great tragic poets some “pre-Christian intuitions,” than to the Old Testament, the content of which appeared to her as barbaric and inhuman.

One must recognize that this original asymmetry has left its imprint upon the development of the Church, and that asymmetry is far from being congenital to the Church. To convince oneself of this, it is enough to look at the two female figures contained in the imposing mosaic on the basilica of St. Sabine in Rome: *ecclesia ex circumcissione, ecclesia ex gentilitate*. Iconography here confirms the most fundamental theology. According to the famous formula of Justin Martyr, the Church is a *tertium genus* — a “third kind” and new reality different from both Jew and gentile. However the Christians that form it do come both from Judaism and the gentile world. In fact, thanks to a mysterious rupture that is yet to be healed, the Church has become to a large extent a Church of gentiles which at times seems to have forgotten its biblical roots.

The same distortion and the same asymmetry have influenced the use of typology when dealing with traditional exegesis and theology, of which Augustine is a tributary. Typology, used with respect to the phases of God’s design, offers a splendid key for understanding, as a single whole, the continuity and progress of the history of salvation. From this perspective, as we noticed in Augustine’s thought, the Old Testament is the prophecy and sacrament of the New; the destiny of Israel announces, prepares and signifies the destiny of the Church. However, insofar as typology plays upon the opposition between past and present as well as between symbol and reality, its univocal application presents some dangers against which the Church Fathers did not always find defenses. The first such danger is that of a too hasty spiritualization, of a Platonism that can be avoided with difficulty, since one is contrasting **sign** and **reality**. Indeed, the risk is that of insisting so much on the **signified reality** that one will neglect or even suppress the existence of the sign. If the meaning of earthly Jerusalem is only that of announcing heavenly Jerusalem, what can be its destiny, when one believes that reality has come full circle?

Here the second danger immediately arises: that of falling into a pessimistic dualism in which the first term of the comparison appears necessarily pejorative. As we saw in the table above, the result is that past and present, Israel and the Church, no longer contrast with each other as figure and reality, announcement and fulfillment, but rather as shadow and light, letter and spirit, carnal and spiritual. In this framework, compared with a heavenly Church, spir-

itual and radiant, which appears as the fulfillment of the People of God, the Jewish People can be seen only as a gloomy earthly and carnal reality.

Such vast simplifications are all the more dangerous because they risk becoming purely abstract categories. That, indeed, is the third danger of a typology turned into a mere algebra of symbols and oppositions, playing within itself and unrelated to reality. At the conclusion of such a handling of contrasting pairs one reaches almost inevitably a kind of Manichean vision in which, since the Church is presented as the true Israel (*verus Israel*) and the true Jerusalem, the people of the Bible and earthly Jerusalem are placed — as we have seen — on the side of Babylon.

On the level of their literary and symbolic expressions, the Church Fathers, when using typology, were not able to avoid such dangers consistently. Using the terms proposed in the Epistle to the Hebrews (8:5; 9:23; 10:1), we can say that both in their understanding of Israel and the Jewish People on the one hand, and in their conception of the relations between the Old and the New Testaments on the other, they endlessly swung — as Augustine did — between two visions of things, insisting now on the darkness and now on the figure, now on the rupture and now on the continuity.

Aristotle can provide us here with the most adequate instruments for expressing this paradox. In the first book of his *Physics*, he points out that there are two ways of describing a transformation or transition. One is in terms of privation and possession: the passage from black to white is the passage from non-being to being, from absence to presence — and from this perspective the acorn **is not** an oak. The other way is in terms of potentiality and actuality: certainly the acorn is not yet actually an oak, but it is one **potentially**.

Privation–form, potentiality–actuality: it is remarkable that the Church Fathers, and very particularly Augustine, express the link between Israel and the Church, between the Old and New Testaments, using one or other of these two formulas, depending on the circumstances. If the dynamic vision, which from Aristotle onward became the foundation for the intuition of nature, is what permits the formulation of harmonious continuity, it is easy to perceive the danger of a unilateral and univocal insistence upon the opposition manifested in terms of contrast. Within a typology that considers only this aspect of things, the People of Israel loses all its basis of existence and, in particular, all positive existence. The symbol is effaced by the reality that it announced, and its own existence — carnal, earthly and obscure — becomes clearly pejorative.

As we have noticed in Augustine, we ultimately reach the paradox of a sacrament without matter. Israel is the type of the Church, but it no longer exists on its own; earthly Jerusalem is the sacrament of heavenly Jerusalem, but its human and earthly reality is, so to speak, placed within brackets. As for the link between the Jewish People and its Land, it is considered only as a carnal concession, provisional and outdated.

Nonetheless, the Jewish People persists in its existence with both a national consciousness and a religious fidelity. As such, it affirms the link between itself and the land where it lived its destiny at the time of the Bible. As has been shown by our reflections above, the concepts, and sometimes also the clichés,

of a certain traditional theology are unable to give full expression to this state of affairs.

4. Limits of Augustine's Theology

Because of the vastness of his work and the influence he exerts on Western theological thought, Augustine is undoubtedly the Church Father in whom one best appreciates the limits of that theological synthesis of which we have sketched the main lines. One says that, of course, only with fear and hesitation. Under what title, with what right, can one pretend to measure the limits of the thought of a doctor to whom the Church acknowledges such authority? Certainly it appears both dangerous and pretentious to criticize Augustine's thought.

In order to justify the audacity of this suggestion, I shall simply remark that Augustine's theological work is so vast and has so many aspects that it has itself, paradoxically, been a source of heresies, often contradictory ones. It is very significant that both Luther and the Jansenists appealed to Augustine. Furthermore, and at a deeper level, I would say that if it is possible to criticize Augustine, it is inside that world of certitude in which his testimony and his synthesis enfold all. That is how Thomas Aquinas, commenting *a reverenter*, corrected and criticized both Augustine's theology of grace and his philosophy of illumination. In brief, I can share Augustine's faith and his vision of the Christian economy without sharing his philosophy — above all without accepting the conceptual system implied by that philosophy.

Indeed, it is precisely the philosophical instrument that appears to be at fault. Throughout our present study we have noticed the ultimate impossibility of a Platonic philosophy of history, or rather the difficulty presented by a Platonic philosophy when it comes to interpret the Bible or refer to the history of salvation. The dualism and the pessimism that we have noticed, and even more so the system of categories that is the concrete expression of that dualism, are unable to encompass the living and complex reality of the relationship between Jews and Christians, while simultaneously trying adequately to respect the mystery that it contains. On purely philosophical grounds, it appears that in order properly to express such thoughts one would be more at ease using the spiritualistic evolutionism of Bergson, or above all the optimistic and realistic hylemorphism of Thomas Aquinas.

Had one pointed out to Augustine the rigor with which he contrasts Synagogue and Church, and in particular the severity of some of his judgments on the Jews, he would surely have replied that his purpose was to compare two stages of the divine economy without any preconceived judgment about the personal destiny of the individuals who lived according to different regimes. As we have mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Pascal aptly translated Augustine's thought when he remarked that there are Christians of the Old Testament just as there are Jews of the New. Jews and Christians, Synagogue and Church, are for Augustine abstract categories that signify not sociological realities but spiritual attitudes. We have also stressed his benevolent stand — despite his theoretical positions — on the Jews in terms of their concrete existence.

We may admit that if some of Augustine's texts seem like severe judgments or even condemnations, they receive a wholly different significance when we give them back their value of being descriptions of inner experiences. Israel, the Jews, the Synagogue, even in those texts where they appear in opposition to Christ and to the Church, stand out as examples of every spiritual adventure, ones which are all the more exemplary because they have been elected and chosen by God. Within such a perspective, the Jews appear as the mysterious and privileged figure of every soul chosen by God in view of a divine destiny, of every human created with predilection and loved in his or her singularity, called upon to love the Lord, to wait for his Advent and to acknowledge it, while equally exposed to the fearful risk of spiritual blindness and refusal. Even an obscurity or failure of Israel will then occur in that perspective of an exemplary destiny, in which the Law and its demands apply equally to all of us. There is no doubt that for Augustine the Jews must be placed in that light, to embody that type of humanity, sinner and saint at the same time.

Having said all the above, we are still left with the final question: does Augustine do justice to the *realia* of the Jewish economy? Certainly he grants to the destiny and the realities of Judaism a typological and exemplary meaning; but what about their own kind of existence? We cannot but recognize that such a kind of existence has no place in Augustine's system. While he admits that the rites and signs of the old covenant, such as circumcision and the Sabbath, had their own value in the past, that value is now gone. Furthermore, from the point of view of the newness that comes with the Advent of Christ, those realities were radically imperfect because tinted by pessimism. So also with the link to the Land.

It is certain that Augustine provides no definite answer to the question that we have posed at the beginning of our enquiry, simply because he did not ask such a question. However, the elements that he proposes do guide the elaboration of a reply in a very negative sense. If, in the eyes of Augustine, the earth was the object of the divine promise, it was only as a preparation and a condescension. Provisional and rendered obsolete, the link with this earth was marked by the carnal character of all attachment to earthly reality. It would be very difficult to find in Augustine's theology a justification for the reality of the link between the Jewish People and its Land today. Rather, from his theology one would glean arguments to support the opposite stand — and indeed a number of theologians have not missed the chance.

Just one of the passages that we have studied gives a hint that is not entirely negative. We saw that, when pressed on the question of how the Old Testament could have promised the Land of Israel to the Jews until "the end of the age," he answered that even if the Jews had been expelled from Jerusalem, they were still to be found in many other places within the Land and would stay there "until the end." Moreover, even the Christians present everywhere in the Land, he added, were of Abraham's seed, that is of Jewish origin. Here there is a forced acknowledgement that the Jewish link with the Land is a reality that, like other aspects of Jewish existence in Augustine's estimation, somehow continues to have a vestigial existence even after the Advent of Christ. However, this merely allows us to refute the claims of those theologians just alluded to who

appeal to Augustine in order to deny any remaining Jewish link to the Land. It is thoroughly inadequate for an evaluation of current Jewish existence, whether religious or national.

We can ask whether the incomplete character of Augustine's reply, and even more so its negative tendency, do not indicate that his synthesis has its limits in the case when we face a precise issue, the novelty of which puzzles us. Sacrament without matter, symbol the meaning of which cancels the existence of its own sign — Augustine's typology recalls those spiritual qualities which praise renunciation while ignoring the positive reality of the things to which a human becomes attached, but which one is called to give up. Detachment without any prior attachment! Unquestionably "neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father" (John 4:21). Yet, in order to transcend the particularism of any place, do we not need the experience of the link with a living place? That, in fact, is the meaning of the attachment of the Jewish soul to the Land where its history and its tradition put down eternal roots. And this particular bond between the Jewish People and its Land — the earthly Jerusalem — was it not essential to make us understand our belonging to the Jerusalem of the spirit, the reality of which is in heaven?

This question leads us to another one, broader and more fundamental. Basically the quest is for the discovery of the cause of that misunderstanding on the part of Christian tradition of what is Jewish consciousness with all that it has implied: the sense of election, the belonging to a common identity, the attachment to a homeland, the centrality of Jerusalem. Facing Augustine's synthesis, which emphasizes so severely the discontinuities and the ruptures, we are entitled to ask whether the ultimate limit of this thought, and of the mentality that it represents, do not derive from his Platonism. At a deeper level, is a Platonic philosophy capable of fully interpreting the mysterious dynamism that binds Israel and the Church in the continuity of God's unique design?

On this matter it appears that today, and most particularly since the Second Vatican Council, we are witnessing a decisive and irreversible progress, a progress all the more evident wherever Jews and Christians engage seriously in dialogue and become open to mutual recognition.

This does not suppress the differences. In a way one can even say that the progress made so far strengthens them, because we can now observe them within a common lucidity and in mutual tolerance. Jews and Christians may now tell each other: we agree to disagree, admitting what separates us, while simultaneously stressing the continuities that bind us together.

The hope springing from this movement is that Christian consciousness will discover, all the more clearly, that the synthesis embodied in Augustine is one of many theologies and that it is possible — without becoming the paricide of such a great master — to share his faith and his hope, while not necessarily employing his philosophy.

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