

## Church Jews: Self-betrayal or Divine Vocation?

Since I am to speak about Church Jews, I believe it will make my task easier if I start by declaring whom I am not going to speak about. First, I will not speak about these Jews who can hardly be said to have been *in* the Church because they were the ones who *founded* her; namely, the Apostles and their immediate successors. Neither do I want to speak about the ten of thousand, probably hundreds of thousand, maybe millions of Jews who, throughout almost two millennia of Christendom, were forced to become members of the Church, this in order to keep their estate, position or, in many cases, their own life together with that of their loved ones. Most of these Jews were in the Church only formally, which means that they were not in the Church according to the truth of what makes someone member of the Church, a living stone in the living Body of Christ. Thus, the Jews I want to speak about are those who, during the same period, have *sincerely* decided to join an established Church. Should they be counted by the thousand, the thousand or hundred of thousand? Have they been ten or one million? We will never know. First, for obvious reasons, they could hardly have had an interest in insisting upon their Jewish origin within their new ecclesial settings, at least in the past centuries. Second, one can always question the sincerity of their engagement. Was it not in reality motivated, more or less consciously, by the prospect of gaining some material advantage at times when Churches played a preeminent role as to defining the conditions of social recognition? From the point of view of the Jewish tradition, what matters is not their degree of sincerity, something which is always difficult to assess, but the fact that they were not positively forced to convert. It reserves the term of Meshumadim, apostates, literally “those who are annihilated”, to this precise category of Jews. In a religion to which one belongs by dint of one’s flesh and blood, or in a condition where one’s flesh and blood are the primary criterion of religion, changing faith has always been perceived as a betrayal of one’s Nation, community and accordingly, closest of kin, especially in circumstances when the very survival of the Jewish entity stood under threat.

Let us therefore assume that, in some cases, the Jews who, notwithstanding the plight of their community and loved ones, carried out their decision to join an established Church like the Catholic one, had not lost until the most elementary sense of honesty, courage and filial gratitude. How could we explain this fact except by appealing to the belief that they were surrendering to a higher order of truth – an order they perceived as so vital, so fundamental that

they were led to put any other consideration aside? This would make their decision look like a stopgap solution. "I cannot not do it, so that the advantage of doing it exceeds the disadvantage of not doing it, no matter how great be the damage caused by my decision and hideous the stigma I will henceforth bear in the eyes of my former community".

In this presentation, I would like to challenge this view by asking the following question: is it impossible to perceive in this decision a meaning that would completely change our perspective on what appears to be the inevitable and painful corollary of one's fidelity to oneself and to God? Indeed, could we not see in these conversions an effect of God's providence drawing out of an apparent evil a higher good and making us understand in hindsight that this betrayal was a necessary way to go in order to bring forth an ultimate witness of loyalty and solidarity towards the whole Jewish nation? Christians are familiar with such reversals of perspective. They have the very form of a Paschal mystery as it unfolds the hidden necessity, on behalf of universal salvation, of what appeared hitherto to be a disastrous human failure. Still, making the case for a reversal of this kind when speaking of Jewish converts seems to be a new and challenging venture to say the least. How on earth could the decision to join a religious Body which has almost always viewed Jewish faith as antagonistic and treated Jewish communities accordingly ever be understood as a the token of God's providence towards the Jewish nation? Here, I call providential a divine action which yields the opposite result of a collective betrayal; namely, the preservation of the Nation instead of its destruction. Consequently, what we need to ask is whether a Jew's decision to join a Church like the Catholic Church in order to live in communion with Yeshua can be said to open a path that would imply the preservation of the Jewish nation rather than its disintegration in the shorter or the longer run.

I will not shy away from such a daunting task. Meanwhile I will contend that one cannot designate one Church Jew in particular as the privileged instrument of such providence. In order to define the providential dimension that a Jewish adhesion to an established Church carries with it, we need to sum up and articulate together the manifold ways in which Church Jews have been influencing the mind of the Church. I believe that taken together, these inputs unfold an intelligent Design moving in the direction mentioned above. Ultimately, I hold that this Design gives meaning to each individual Jew's eminently personal decision to join an established Church, even if their life and action has had apparently nothing to do with the Jewish Nation and has long been forgotten.

I will proceed with examining shortly three great figures of Church Jews or, equivalently, three apparent betrayals of the Jewish Nation. These figures are Alphonse-Marie of Ratisbonne, Daniel

Rufensen and Edith Stein. I could have evoked many others, and I will indeed refer to a few more names, but contemplating the paths of these three figures will be sufficient, I believe, to grasp the way in which God's providence has been at work through the life and action of Church Jews.

### **I. Alphonse-Marie of Ratisbonne : valuing Jewish tradition**

There is little doubt that, in the centuries prior to the age of the Enlightenment, Jewish converts such as Pablo Christiani, the Dominican brother who instigated, the dispute of Barcelona against Nachmanides in 1263, Geronimo de Sante Fe who arranged an even major one in Tortosa two centuries later, Pfefferkorn who, in the midst of the Renaissance, dedicated all its energies to convince the Church of the necessity of burning the Talmud at the stake and so many others, thought that they were the instruments of divine Providence. Simply, their idea of Providence was the opposite of the one we just presented. It consisted of persuading to fellow Jews that they had to give up the faith and tradition of their forefathers for the sake of Christ. Meanwhile, those who, in a situation of dire social inferiority, fought for the life of the Jewish nation were the rabbis who opposed them. One needs to keep this category of Jewish converts in mind to appreciate the influence that someone like Alphonse of Ratisbonne exerted on the mind of the Church at a much later stage.

Alphonse was born in 1814, in a wealthy – his father was a banker- and religiously observant home . He could rely on the prospect of a brilliant social position in a society that would see the abrogation of the last remnants of anti-Jewish legislation. According to Théodore de Bussièrès, his friend and biographer, Alphonse had decided at an early age that he would dedicate his existence to the “regeneration” of the Jewish nation, a term which hinted at a combination of religious renewal and social development<sup>1</sup>. Theodore, his brother, having converted and left home to become a priest, Alphonse blamed him for his betrayal although he resented him being totally ostracized by his parents. Growing more and more distant from Jewish religious practice, he did not lose his fundamental attachment to his Nation for that matter. A conversation with Bussièrès, a few days before his conversion which took place during a pleasure trip to Rome, bears witness to his state of mind at the time. While falling prey to some sort of religious emotion in Rome, Alphonse told Bussièrès that passing through the Ghetto and observing the miserable condition of Jews, his hatred of Catholicism was kindled again. “ I said to myself: ‘After all, it was a loftier thing to be on the side of the oppressed than the oppressors’”. Bussièrès relates the exchange that

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<sup>1</sup> *The Conversion of Marie-Alphonse de Ratisbonne*, New-York : 1856 ?

ensued in the following terms: “I tried in my eager fervour to impart on him my Catholic convictions; but he only smiled at my efforts, said that he felt a sincere pity for my superstition, and *that he was born a Jew and a Jew he would die* [NB- according to his own words]”<sup>2</sup>. Taking into account such dispositions, his sudden conversion in a church of Rome while waiting for his friend on a pew, could hardly not have been held as a miracle from on the Catholic side. Actually, his vision of the Virgin Mary was a perfect illustration of the theological definition of a miracle; namely, a reversal of the natural order due to a direct intervention of God. What Alphonse had hitherto identified with darkness suddenly revealed itself as pure light. “Oh(..) what a fullness of grace and happiness! how pitiable the lot of those who know not!” were among the exclamations, interrupted with deep sobs, that Bussi res heard on his lips that day. The result was that Alphonse took the very steps that he had found so loathsome when his brother took them: he received baptism and became a priest. Fairly soon after his first years of ministry as a Jesuit, Alphonse again heard the calling to work for the regeneration of his people, but this time as a Catholic priest. According to his own words, “the will of God in my Conversion and in my vocation to the priesthood obviously destined me to work for the salvation of Israel”<sup>3</sup>. He and his brother went to Jerusalem where they founded houses and orphanage schools. They eventually formed the embryo of a bicephalous religious congregation which would later take the name of brothers and sisters of Zion.

At this point, how should we look at the Providence to which Alphonse ascribed his calling as a Catholic priest working on behalf of the salvation of Israel? To some extent, Alphonse shared the perspective of the medieval Meshumadim. that of bringing Jews to Christ and to the Church. There was however a fundamental difference between Alphonse and his medieval predecessors: he did not think that Jewish religious culture, tradition and lifestyle were to be held in contempt as adverse to Christ. This means that, from the beginning, the Ratisbonne brothers set before themselves a goal that never crossed the mind of their medieval predecessors; namely, that of changing the traditional view of their Church on the value of the Jewish tradition. This was certainly not an easy task. Whether their efforts were to affect the mind of the Church remained a dubious conjecture until the second Vatican Council and the *Nostra Aetate* declaration. This being said, we only partly answered our initial question. Indeed, can we speak in the case of Alphonse of a Providence aiming at safeguarding the Jewish nation? To this question, we must answer ‘no’, at

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<sup>2</sup> p.30.

<sup>33</sup> <http://archive.today/D42ga>.

least if we have in mind the conscious perspective of the Ratisbonne brothers. They certainly had a softer approach to the issue of the integration of Jews into the Church than medieval Jewish converts. However, for lack of a reflection on the conditions of a specific Jewish path within the Church, the success of their endeavour would have brought with it a happy melting away of Jewish identity and culture. In the shorter or longer run, integration would have meant assimilation to the rites, customs and the very national life that characterized Gentile Christianity. However, it remains possible to think that the Providential design that manifested itself in the ministry of Alphonse went beyond his conscious grasp. Let us therefore turn to the second Jewish figure that I want to briefly evoke here and see whether this figure can add some new element to our limited understanding of God's impenetrable ways.

## **2. Daniel Rufeisen: Christianity is Hebrew**

If Daniel Rufeisen is an emblematic case of betrayal of Jewish identity, it is because never was such a betrayal so close, in my opinion, to the purest and I dare say the most glorious example of loyalty towards Jewish identity.

The childhood of Daniel, born in 1922 in a poor Jewish home and a small Polish town, is reminiscent of a time where Jewish identity had much less to do with religious practice than nowadays. For the young Oswald Rufeisen, it went almost without saying that Zionism was the most authentic expression of the significance that one would ascribe to one's Jewish identity. Nechama Tec, who wrote the biography of Fr. Daniel, provides a detailed and fascinating account of the way in which personal exposure to Nazi persecutions, indefinitely expanded by the cruelty of local anti-Semites of various ethnic backgrounds did but strengthen Oswald's resolution to do whatever possible to help his fellow Jews. A hardly credible chain of circumstances gave him the opportunity to put his resolution into practice. Finding himself totally isolated, wandering from one place to another under a fake Polish identity, Daniel came to be recruited as an interpreter by the German police of Mir, a town close to the Russian border. Putting his life at continuous risk, the one whom his erstwhile comrades describe as a shy and gentle Jewish boy used his position to channel to local Jews vital information about Nazi plans of arrests and mass murders. He personally supervised the escape of three hundred Jews from the Mir ghetto, providing them with weapons while feeding Germans with misleading tips. Denounced by a local Jew, arrested, he managed to escape by dint of another radically unlikely sequence of events. Repeatedly on the point of being killed by locals and partisans of all tendencies, he eventually landed in a convent of

sisters who knew him from his time with the Nazi police. It is there, hiding in the attic, that Oswald came to faith in Yeshua. This dazzling spiritual journey begun with coming across a relation of miraculous healings in Lourdes. At this point, I feel compelled to quote some of the words Rufeisen himself used when he recalled the event and the sequence of thoughts that went with it:

*And so, after I read about these miraculous cures I asked for the New Testament and began to study it. I also read different Hebrew books that I found in the attic. . . . I was full of questions. I kept asking why such tragic things were happening to my people. I felt very much like a Jew, I identified with the plight of my people. I also felt like a Zionist. I longed for Palestine, for my own country. . . .*

*In this frame of mind I became exposed to the New Testament, a book that describes events that were taking place in my fatherland, the land I was longing for. This, in itself, must have created a psychological bridge between me and the New Testament. . . . Strange as it may seem, I had a Polish high school diploma but I never read the New Testament. No one demanded it of me. About the church I knew only negative things. I was prejudiced against the church.*

*In the convent, all alone, among strangers, I created an artificial world for myself. I pretended that the 2000 years had never happened. In this make-believe world of mine I am confronted by Jesus from Nazareth. . . . If you will not understand this, you will not understand my struggle for the right to my Jewish nationality. . . . And so I am faced with Jesus from Nazareth. . . . You must realize that not all history about Jesus is the history of the church. The history of Jesus is a fragment of Jewish history. Then I follow the exchanges of ideas and arguments that took place between Jesus and some of the Jews, different kinds of Jews. Soon I begin to lean more and more toward the position taken by Jesus. I find myself agreeing with Jesus' approach and view of Judaism. His sermons appeal to me strongly. In this process I somehow disregard all that happened later in the relationship between the Jews and the Christians.*

*At the same time I needed a teacher, someone that would show me the way, a guide . . . someone strong. . . . And so I come to the stage where Jesus dies on the cross and then is resurrected.*

*Suddenly, and I don't know how, I identify his suffering and resurrection with the suffering of my people and the hope of their resurrection. I begin to think that if a man who is just and pure dies, not for his sins but because of circumstances, there must be a God, because it is God who brings him back to life. Then I think that if there is justice toward Christ in the form of resurrection there will be some kind of justice toward my people too.*

*I was cut off from my Jewishness almost for a year. I was separated from all that was Jewish. I felt then that for the Jew in this church there must be a reserved place, I am not wrong about it. I became convinced that perhaps I have some special function to perform in this church, maybe to improve, to fix the relation between the Jews and the Christians. . . .*

*In the end my move to Christianity was not an escape from Judaism but, on the contrary, a way of finding answers to my problems as a Jew. . . . When I realized that I stood before a decision to embrace Catholicism the psychological battle began. I myself had all the prejudices about Jews who convert to Christianity. Aware of these prejudices, I was afraid that my people, the Jews, will reject me. Actually, they did not. At any rate, my psychological battle lasted for two days. During that time I cried a lot, asking God for guidance. . . .*

*It was not an intellectual battle. . . . Intellectually I accepted Jesus. The entire problem was what will be my relationship to the Jewish people, to my brothers*

*possibly to my parents if they lived"*<sup>4</sup>.

On the very day of his conversion, the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1942, Daniel asked the sisters to baptize him. It is the idea that Christianity was merely a legitimate interpretation of Judaism - or the only perfectly legitimate one- that gave him the strength to face the accusation of betraying the Jewish nation. This was simply not true. Let me quote his own words again: "(...) Aristotle once said, 'Plato is my friend but the truth is stronger than friendship'. Do you understand? If God approved of this man [Yeshua] so it is my duty to follow what I see as right. This is stronger than my ties with my people... After all, human ties are also created by God!"<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, however, Oswald had a clear awareness that the very Church that he was willing to join had lost a great deal of her original truth from sight. Due to the circumstances of history, being baptized meant that a Jew would need to become member of an overwhelmingly Gentile organization in order to delve

<sup>4</sup> p.166-167.

<sup>5</sup> p.167-168.

into a life of communion with his brothers and sisters. But it was not like that at the beginning. Then the Church was what she is quintessentially: a Jewish institution welcoming the communion between Jews and Gentiles. I quote his words again: “The New Testament is Jewish, written by Jews for Jews, almost the entire New Testament...Just because at this moment the inheritors, this administrators of the Testament are not Jews does not mean that I have to remove myself from it”<sup>6</sup>. After the war and his Alya, Daniel concentrated his efforts on creating a space for a different type of interaction between Jews and Gentiles who already shared a common faith in Yeshua. This activity eventually combined with that of the “group of St James” which counted a number of Dominican brothers and lay people of Jewish origin among its members. One could say that rather than converting Jews, Daniel’s goal was to convert the Church. Let me quote Daniel again: “(...) instead of remaining Roman Catholic Christians, we will try to restore Hebrew Christianity as it existed at the beginning. (...) Some of us have Jewish backgrounds, some are non-Jews. In Israel we try to create a homogeneous community made up of Hebrew praying Christians that resembles the early Christian Jews”<sup>7</sup>. I cannot expand here on the involvement of the St James group, together with Jewish priests like Oestereicher and Baum, in the preparatory works to the *Nostra Aetate* Declaration. Suffice it to mention that the Kehilla or the community of Hebrew speaking Catholics in Israel, currently headed by Fr. David Neuhaus, is a fruit of this group.

As I said earlier the alleged betrayal of a Jew who never ceased, even after becoming a Christian, to defend the Jewish nation and the value of the Jewish tradition is a study case - and it did not fail to become one in reality. True, many of his old friends, including a number of survivors of the Mir ghetto found a way to live up with the fact that Oswald had become fr. Daniel. After all, as a human being, he was still Oswald; that is, a Jew just like them. But Daniel notoriously failed to transform this informal recognition into an official one. In 1962, his plea to receive Israeli citizenship on the motive that he was a Jew or according to the terms of the Law of Return was famously rejected by the High Court of Israel. One reads the following statements among the opinions issued by the five judges:

“An apostate has created a barrier between himself and the national life of the people (...) “ (Landau); “it is a serious application and the applicant is proud of his Jewish

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<sup>6</sup> p.168.  
<sup>7</sup> p.241



affiliations; but for the people, an apostate has dissociated himself from the religion, the people and the community of Israel. The same person cannot be both Jewish and Christian” (Berensohn)<sup>8</sup>.

Notwithstanding, as we have been repeating from the start, what appears as a betrayal in the eyes of mainstream Jews could well be an instrument of divine providence from a Christian point of view. Once again, we need to ask if it is the case with fr. Daniel. Has the adhesion of fr. Daniel to the Catholic Church brought Jews closer to Yeshua while preserving the life of the Jewish nation? This seems to be the very purpose of the idea of promoting a Hebrew form of Christianity. But at this point, one seems to come across some sort of intrinsic limitation of the Catholic Church. If the Church is really a space of authentic communion between Gentiles and Jews, a place that excludes self-segregation, how could the Jewish component of this communion avoid disintegration in the shorter or longer run, given the crushing weight of an almost bi-millennial tradition as well as basic demographic mechanisms? True, the reversal of the normal situation in Israel, a country where Jews are the majority and Jewish traditions play a defining role, can make the Jewish component of this communion appear more or less sustainable. But precisely, the influence of a social and political environment does not say anything about the essence of the Church. In the framework of the Catholic Church, one seems incapable of assigning to the notion of a Jewish entity a concrete and stable structure- *ecclesia sui juris*, congregation or even movement- without violating the principle of true communion. Nowadays, the *kehilla* defines itself, *volens nolens*, as that part of the Catholic Church in Israel which uses Hebrew as a liturgical and daily language, and not as some sort of revised version of a primeval Hebrew Christianity. Does that mean that God’s Providence is for nothing in the life and action of Fr. Daniel- that it was all about little else than a splendid illusion? From medieval converts to Alphonse of Ratisbonne, from Alphonse to fr. Daniel, we are able to discern a movement from within the Catholic Church that goes towards an increasing recognition of her Jewish dimension. As I briefly evoke a last figure of Church Jew, Edith Stein, I would like to show how, seen in connection with the other figures mentioned here, she points towards the final form that such a recognition would bring with it.

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### 3. Edith Stein: the Church is neither Jewish nor Gentile

When Edith took the step that effectively led her to separate from the members of her family, ten years after receiving baptism in a discreet manner and several months after Hitler had come to power, the first Nazi anti-Jewish laws had already been promulgated. Towards the end of 1933, Edith went home to tell her mother and sisters about her decision to enter the Order of the Carmel. I do not think that facing the bottomless and almost entirely silent pain of her dignified 84 years old mother, unable to understand that one “could not be a good and religious person without becoming a Christian”, was the most trying moment during this short trip. Relating these events in her *Chronicle for the Carmel of Köln*, Edith recalls the conversation that she had with Suse, her 12 years old niece, as both had gone out for a walk. At some point, Suse asked her bluntly: “Warum tuts du das *jetzt* ?” “Why are you doing that now?”<sup>9</sup>. Personally, I am not certain I would have been able to handle this question without contemplating the possibility of committing suicide. Edith did not lose composure though. She writes that she did not try to justify herself. Instead, she explained her reasons to Suse “as she would have done for an adult”. There is little doubt Edith thought her duty was to pay obedience to a truth that stood above human contingencies, absolutely tragic though they might be. But how could we ever conceive of such an betrayal in terms of a hidden manifestation of God’s providential care for his Nation?

From the moment Edith became conscious of the Nazi threat, which happened incidentally during a conversation in 1933, she had the intuition that her own destiny would not be dissociated from that of her people. In the same text, she writes: “I had heard before about the hard measures taken against the Jews. But this time, it somehow flashed to my mind that God had laid his weighty hand over his people once again, and also that the fate of this people was my fate too”<sup>10</sup> (*Beitrag*, p.346). What is striking however is that Edith, during her years as a Carmelite, from April 1934 to her death in Auschwitz, on August 9th 1942, did not try to overcome the rift that her conversion had generated between her and her fellow Jews, even her closest ones, at least on an ordinary human level. She never endeavored to communicate her faith or to justify herself. She did not either indulge in considerations about a Jewish form of Christianity. Contrary to fr. Daniel, she behaved as an “ordinary” Carmelite sister, cultivating the teachings of her spiritual tradition with endless trust and veneration. As far as I know, the only moment when she

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<sup>9</sup> “Ein Beitrag zur Chronik des Kölner Karmel” in *Aus dem Leben, op.cit. Aus dem Leben einer jüdischen Familie, Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe (ESG)*, Herder, 2002, p.359-360.

<sup>10</sup> *Selbstbildnis in Briefen II*, ESW 3, let.573 to Petra Brüning, p.338.

showed signs of rebellious spirit was when she told off one of her sisters who was praising Hitler during a recreation. Just before entering the Carmel, Edith was precisely relying on her obedience to the Church when she wrote to the Pope, begging him to make a public defense of the Jews for the sake of Christ. I quote these words from a letter to Pius the XII, a letter which received no answer except in the form of a personal blessing: "As a child of the Jewish people who, by the grace of God, for the past eleven years has also been a child of the Catholic Church, I dare to speak to the Father of Christianity about that which oppresses millions of Germans(...) Isn't the effort to destroy Jewish blood an abuse of the holiest humanity of our Savior, of the most blessed Virgin and the apostles?"<sup>11</sup>. Increasingly measuring, behind the walls of her convent, the extent of the disaster as well as the hopelessness of any human attempt to prevent it, Edith soon focused on the only possibility of action that was left to her, a possibility that coincided with the very purpose of her life as a Carmelite nun: prayer. In her spiritual writings of this period, she repeatedly draws an analogy between herself and the biblical Esther, imploring the King of kings to save her people from the hand of Amman, the Jew-hater. Concluding a letter to a friend, dating from 1938, where she develops this theme, she writes: "I am poor and powerless, but the King who has chosen me, is boundlessly mighty and merciful"<sup>12</sup>. .. In the thought of Edith, it is clear that if God, assumed the features of an alien king, it is not because he was no longer the king of Jews, but because the Jews themselves had refused to welcome their legitimate king.

True, the prayer of Edith seems to have been less successful than the one of Esther. But I see in this spiritual endeavor itself something crucial as to the question we are dealing with. Edith believed in the Church she had become a member of. In particular, she believed that this Church could not be unfaithful to her Jewish origin or that she could quintessentially not be more Gentile than Jewish, and this it in spite of attitudes that around her and up to the summit of the hierarchy, seemed to demonstrate the very opposite. She was convinced that clinging to a calling that was not more Gentile than it was Jewish gave her access to the inner recess of God, to that Jewish heart of God to which mainstream Jews had lost access. And she would put in the balance the personal suffering she had incurred as a result of her separation from her people in order to attract the mercy of the King of kings upon this very people.

What comes to the fore here is the fact that every Jew that decides to join the Church witnesses by his or her very decision that this Church is, at the core or according to her

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<sup>11</sup><http://www.baltimorecarmel.org/saints/Stein/letter%20to%20pope.htm>

<sup>12</sup> *Selbstbildnis in Briefen II*, ESW 3, let.573 to Petra Brüning, p.338

truth, no more Gentile than Jewish. Be he a rebellious Judaizer or a zealous traditionalist, a Jew who becomes a Catholic, Orthodox Christian or Lutheran prevents by his very existence his Church from thinking that she is an institution for Gentiles, an organization that can view Jews and Judaism as a foreign and hostile element. The more sincerely a Jew makes his own a life-style that mainstream Jews reject as Gentile, the more evident becomes the fact that this life-style is not about Gentiles, but about Christ, as the one in whom Jews and Gentiles can experience reconciliation in truth.

But there is one more element to learn from the witness of Edith, and it is a decisive one. For Edith, the Holocaust was a physical and spiritual tragedy that had to do with the inner life of the Jewish nation exclusively. She had no doubt Christ was in the midst of Jews, by dint of an invisible communion of suffering, and no longer on the side of a Gentile world who, as she writes elsewhere, had drifted towards a yet unheard form of apostasy. From the depth of this cosmic night, the prayerful mind of Edith could perceive the seed of a spiritual renewal that would come from the innermost of the Jewish Nation, as if the Holocaust had played the role of some eschatological Kippur on its behalf. One of her last writings, *Conversation at Night*, describes the mysterious visit of Queen Esther, dressed as a poor pilgrim, to her prioress<sup>13</sup>. At some point, Esther tells about future events that she has contemplated in herself “as in a mirror of eternal clarity”:

***“I saw the Church grow out of my people,***

A tenderly blooming sprig, saw that her heart was

The unblemished, pure, shoot of David.

I saw flowing down from Jesus' heart”

What I understand here is that the regeneration of Israel will not come from the Church in her current form. It is the regeneration of the Church which will come from Israel, when the Nation will come of itself, freely and unhindered, to the knowledge of Yeshua by dint of the grace poured out upon it by the Crucified. The principle of communion between Jews and Gentiles, of which the Church is the faithful depositary, will apply to Israel when, on the one hand, Israel will discover Yeshua out of its own initiative and, on the other, the Church will acknowledge in the physical existence of Israel a channel of Christ's regenerating grace. If this were to happen sometime in the future, the workings of the Providence that we have identified in the life and ministry of Church Jews like Alphonse of Ratisbonne and Daniel Rufeisen, would come to full

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<sup>13</sup> ESW 11, pp- 165-171.

intelligibility. With many others, the memory of whom is lost except for God, these Church Jews have prepared the Church to the moment where she would have to acknowledge that she needs Israel - Israel living, breathing and moving- as much as Israel needs her. The full restoration of Israel as the People of God, distinct from what that Church is and yet a vital element of the communion which is the Church, is, I believe, the ultimate word of the Providence that has led numerous Jews, throughout history, to take on themselves the blame of betraying their Nation. It is difficult to conceive more glaring evidence that Meshumadim do not necessarily betray their nation than the way Edith Stein died, a simple Jew indistinguishable from six millions others whose life all of a sudden sunk into nothingness. If ever this death had a providential meaning, it is contained in the few words that Edith said to her sister when the agents of the Gestapo came to arrest them both. Actually, these few words summarize what any Jew could say about his or her personal decision to join the Church: "Komm, wir gehen für unser Volk! Come, let us go for our People!"