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CATHOLICS AND JEWS AFTER 1967
A NEW SITUATION?

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Since the Vatican Declaration of "Nostra Aetate" concerning the relations between the Catholic Church and non-Christian religions, was promulgated on October 28, 1965, a slow but sound and effective change in the Church can be recognized. It is clear that painful misunderstandings over many centuries cannot be removed in a single year. But, it is also clear, that the Church sincerely sought in the Vatican Council, a new and better understanding of itself. Praying, listening, discussing, struggling, it discovered many new insights into its very being. One of the points most discussed was the relation between the Church and the Jewish people. This fact, in itself, shows how deeply this question touches the heart of the Church. Israel is, either a stumbling block for the Church, or it points out a deep mystery of divine revelation, in which both the Church and Judaism participate. It is not necessary to digress here on the history of the relations between the Church and Judaism for the past 20 centuries, because, as you know, there have been many dark patches. Nor do I need to speak about the difficult and painful struggle of the Vatican Council to come to a positive statement. The final result was neither very good, nor very bad. It was a compromise, addressed to Catholics; a pastoral document in a positive spirit, and as such a revolutionary declaration compared with statements of former Councils.

Here I would like to call your attention to the particular way in which the Vatican Declaration approaches its relation to Judaism. Unlike the way in which it speaks about other religions, it begins with the words: "As this Sacred Synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it recalls the spiritual bond linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham's stock".

At the very moment of searching into the mystery of the Church, the Council speaks of her relation to Israel. This relation, therefore, is not just one of the many points of doctrine of the Church, but it touches the very mystery of the Church as such; this relation is connected with the very essence of the Church.

The word "recalls" is a remarkable expression, too. It is, as if, after a long time of oblivion and unawareness, the Church now, in a new situation of development and reflection, remembers that essential link, this essential aspect of her being. It is further remarkable, how many times -- more than in any other document of the Council, -- words that indicate the memory of the Church are used. For example: "the Church of Christ acknowledges, that ...

the beginnings of her faith and her election are already found among the patriarchs..." "She, (the Church) professes that... the salvation of the Church was mystically foreshadowed..." "...The Church cannot forget, that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy, designed to establish the Ancient Covenant". "Also, the Church ever keeps in mind the words of the Apostles about his kinsmen..." "the Church recalls too from the Jewish people sprang the apostles...." "Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great..." "mindful of the common patrimony with the Jews... she deplores hatred..." (1)

In the movement of aggiornamento in the world of today, the Church reflects deeply upon her origin, all too quickly and too easily overlooking a long and sad history, but then, nevertheless, almost as a surprise, she recalls, rediscovers, her essential link with Judaism. At a time of changes of world-wide dimensions, the Church is on the way to rediscovering Judaism and thus to realizing a forgotten, essential aspect of the divine salvation plan. The Canadian theologian, Bernard Lambert, describes it in these words:

"Judaism remains outside the Church and still it does not cease from working on her and in her. It works in the Church through the Jewish origin of Christianity; it works on the Church through a sort of solidarity in destiny, that makes Jews and Christians unceasingly encounter one another on the cross-roads of History". (2)

Thus a new awareness found expression in the Vatican Declaration. It was, no doubt, prepared by several events and by an increasing understanding in some circles both within and without the Catholic Church. The Vatican Document is an important step, but it is only a first official step. It is a theoretical statement, the result of a painfully won insight on the part of the leaders of the Catholic Church. All will depend on whether - and how - this document is put into practice, as understandingly, many Jews have observed.

Since then, several bishops have been active in implementing this declaration in their dioceses, - here in England, in the United States, in Chile and in other countries. The work started slowly, because it is not just a question of changing some texts of catechetical, homiletical and liturgical books. It is not only a question of finding another social attitude, - a more open, human and biblical attitude towards Jews. All these things are necessary and important, but the question still lies deeper and concerns a change in a deeply rooted, traditional mentality, which, as a religious conviction, has consciously and even more, unconsciously, an impact on all aspects of human behaviour.

In this situation of a new consciousness of the essential links between Christians and Jews, an important event took place in 1967: the increasing tension in the Middle East, which led to the "Six Days' War" of June between several Arab States and Israel. And now, coming to the central topic of this conference, we ask ourselves whether after the "Six Days' War" a new situation in the relations between Catholics and Jews has not arisen. I will not discuss the political or military

aspects of the question, as I am not competent to do so, nor will I study the background of the creation of the State of Israel, - what I want to point out is the meaning of this war for the Catholic-Jewish relationship. Much has already been written about the disappointment of most Jews at the silence of the Catholic Church, and other Churches, during May and June of last year, when an important part of the Jewish people was in real danger of extermination. Mention has been made of blackmail for political involvement, of bitterness of many Jews, of the senselessness of any further contact between Christians and Jews, and of the complete failure of all preceeding talks and dialogues in some countries. All these reactions are very understandable, and, in fact, we were faced with a new, unhappy phase in Jewish-Christian relations. And yet, I think that many reactions did not register:

- 1) the complexity of the situation and of the problem, and
- 2) the positive and promising points, that finally were and will be the result of these events. Let me digress a little on both points.

- 1) Most Christians, and certainly most church leaders, had not followed the development of the Middle East situation, and considered the tension, and then the war, as one of the many points of unrest in the world, and particularly in this area, where throughout history so many unfortunate wars and troubles have taken place. Therefore, church leaders received demands for help and support from Christianity from both sides. It was not easy to distinguish right from wrong. Many were afraid of becoming involved in political affairs. They wanted to separate clearly politics from religion, and that meant, in actual fact, that they wanted a clear separation between the State of Israel and Judaism as a religion, because they considered Judaism primarily, or exclusively, as a religion.

I think, it is true and honest to say that in the Jewish world also, the situation was more complex than it sometimes suggested. Before the events of May and June, the link between Diaspora Jewry and Israel showed all possible degrees of strength and weakness. A considerable part of the world Jewry was certainly not deeply conscious of its personal and existential bond with the country of Israel. I, myself, was rather surprised and even disappointed, when at the beginning of last year I had many talks with American Jews, and discovered that many of them showed very little interest in the real meaning of Israel and its development. Many Israelis complained about the same lack of interest of their fellow Jews in several countries of the Diaspora.

Now the result of these events is that world Jewry suddenly became aware of an existing, but not always consciously recognised dimension of their own person and of their own life, namely an existential and essential link with the whole Jewish community and with the land of Israel. This came to the fore during May and June of last year and expressed itself in sharp and violent accusations, and words of deep disappointment against Christians who remained silent. For Christians this reaction was a surprise, they were faced with a Judaism considerably different from what they had imagined, and they have not yet realised either its importance or its implications.

2) Now I come to the second point concerning the positive and promising aspects of the experience of the last months. I am convinced that this painful struggle between Jews and Christians will prove really fruitful. Sometimes events help to awaken a new consciousness of reality; difficult experiences can open one's mind to the true dimensions of existence. First of all, Jewry itself is now more closely united than probably ever before. Particularly since the Enlightenment and the more or less free entrance into society which followed so many centuries of restrictions and unjust limitations, the danger of splitting, division and opposition was not chimerical. Tragic events and dangerous situations such as the last world war and the June war of last year, seem to play a role in the Lord's providential guidance. Furthermore, clearer than ever, this unity is connected with the country of Israel as an essential part of Jewish existence.

For Christians this development, and this well expressed self-awareness are very revealing. They must acknowledge that their way of considering Judaism was not right, that they have seen Judaism in their own categories of thinking, that they have thought about Judaism as a religion, and now it becomes clear, that Judaism is not just a religion, but much more a complex reality, of which religion is one aspect. But then they are faced with a phenomenon they are not accustomed to, they must begin to discover and to respect this reality.

And, finally, the history of this last year has clearly shown, that the so-called dialogues between Jews and Christians, the conversations that took place in various countries, did not yet touch the real problems, they were a first reconnaissance, undertaken, no doubt, with much zeal in some countries. If we study this development carefully, there is no reason objectively for stopping further efforts of contact. To avoid further contacts would be all the more difficult in a world which, every day, is becoming smaller, where men depend on one another more and more. From the Catholic side, the implementation of the Vatican document will continue, and I think that the last months have helped us to implement it on the basis of the reality of our relations. This will finally better serve the real understanding, and even obedience to the Lord, with a view to the full accomplishment of the message of divine revelation. It has become very clear, that now we must begin with the fundamental problems of Jewish-Christian relations.

After this description of the situation in which we are living, I now want to indicate some concrete implications of this development.

1) the building up of better social relations between Jews and Catholics is a question of primary importance. And against the

background of history it is an urgent concern. But social relations are but one question and for three reasons not the most direct point of Jewish-Christian rapprochement. First, good human relations must be established between all men in which we do not necessarily meet as Jews, and as Christians. Secondly, social relations must

rest on a sounder foundation; without a solid basis of a real conviction, social relations can become superficial and, in case of a change in society, they can take a dangerous turn. And, thirdly, in history the social relations between Jews and Christians have largely been determined by theological and religious considerations. Now, also, a change in social behaviour of Christians towards Jews needs to be accompanied by, and founded on a theological conviction.

2) Judaism must be acknowledged as it is, according to its own self-understanding, and not as Christians want to see it. Too many Christians have considered Jews as a remnant of the past, or as future Christians. According to a largely traditional theological view, after the coming of Jesus as Messiah, there was no place for Jews in Christian thinking. They had failed in their mission, rejected the Messiah and were replaced by the nations, hence, their only way to salvation was through conversion to Christianity.

However, this attitude overlooked several essential aspects of the question:

- a) Judaism, at the time of Jesus, was not a legalistic and formalistic, but a very living religious community with a strong messianic and eschatological expectation. There can be no doubt about this fact, since more and more Jewish sources, such as the Qumran scrolls, have become available.
- b) Most Christians did not, and still do not know anything about the development of Judaism itself. Some time ago a priest who attended a religious service conducted by a Rabbi said: "I did not know that Jews could pray so intensely". There is an almost complete lack of knowledge here. The deep spiritual and religious movements within Judaism are unknown, and the simple, daily Jewish life, with its great values, is (apart from some external forms), a closed book for Christians. Therefore, they do not realise that Judaism is based on Holy Scripture and divine revelation, and that it has a special value in the eyes of the same Lord that the Christians adore.
- c) And here I must mention another traditional Christian attitude, which consists in considering the Scripture of the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament, only as a preparation and a pro-figuration of the New Testament. Thus, they have no value in themselves and are exclusively related to the New Testament. Fortunately, the Vatican Constitution on Divine Revelation formulated more carefully the doctrine of the Church and states (no. 15): "the principal (not the only) purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed, was to prepare for the coming, both of Christ, the universal Redeemer, and of the messianic kingdom". And then it goes on: "... the books of the Old Testament... reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. These books... show us true divine pedagogy. These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teaching about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful

treasury of prayer..."

In the second century, Marcion and his disciples tried to abolish the Old Testament, the official Church rejected this theory and excommunicated Marcion in 144. But this tendency survived in the Church and resulted in an underestimation of the Hebrew Bible by many Christians.

- d) With regard to the recognition of Judaism on its own identity, we must say that the Vatican Declaration on the relation between the Church and Judaism, did not express this. It wanted to give the basis of a positive Christian attitude towards Judaism, and, therefore, stressed the common patrimony. Although Pope John and many members of the Vatican Council had in mind the improvement of the actual attitude, and of the relations between Jews and Christians of today, the Council did not succeed in expressing this in the right terms for a real understanding. It was probably not possible, as a dialogical way of thinking particularly in relation to Judaism, began to develop only about this time. So the Declaration speaks in Christian terms about the Jewish religion. While it deals with the values of other religions in the way, and in the form, in which they exist today, it does not speak of the religious and other values of Judaism of today. But it must be said, that the document, by quoting the words of Paul in Romans 9:5 concerning the permanent gifts to Israel, offers the possibility of a clear recognition of these values. As a sequence to the Vatican document, and particularly after the events of 1967, a further statement is needed, in which the identity of Judaism is respected, and in which Judaism is acknowledged as it really is.

3) When we, Christians, consider Judaism seriously according to its own self awareness, then it is clear that the first thing to do is to listen in order to discover what Judaism is. I think that at this stage of development, this is the main point for Christians, to discover the reality, and not a caricature of Judaism. If it is true that many Jews do not know what the Church really is, then I hope, that they also will be prepared to listen and to discover...

Information and instruction are of primary importance. And this not just because it is more or less interesting, but in order to be more obedient to divine revelation, to perceive the mysterious plans of the Lord for his people and for mankind. Among other things then, we will discover the essential link between the three elements of which Judaism, according to Professor Chouraqui of Jerusalem, is composed, namely the revelation of God, the people and the country. In Judaism we find a profound fidelity to the Word of God in Tanach, the Hebrew Bible, a life inspired by the permanent presence of the Lord. (3)

This inspiration has borne fruit in many spiritual movements and in the lives of many Jewish saints.

More difficult to understand will be the bond between the people and the country. As Christianity has had a strong tendency to over-spiritualise religion and faith in connection with its universalism, it will not easily grasp the importance of such a close link between the people of the Book and this particular country. It must be said that, in Christianity and especially in some Christian denominations, a particular veneration has been preserved for the land of Israel as the privileged place of divine revelation. Pilgrimages and visits have always been the sign of a particular interest. Although this is a different type of connection it may be a starting point for a serious study of the link between Judaism and this Land, which could have important impact towards a more realistic Christian life in the world. It could make Christians aware of this almost forgotten part of revelation which speaks about the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

4) But taking Judaism as a whole, on its own identity will pose serious problems with regard to Christian self-understanding. When we study this question in detail, we will have to reconsider several traditional standpoints. Let me explain this more fully.

There are two facts which force us to study this question carefully, one outside the Church and one inside. The first is the exceptional survival of Judaism throughout the centuries, as a strong, living religious community, in spite of persecutions, difficulties and vicissitudes. Here we must try to read the signs of the times. Is this a sign of the Lord? What does this mean for Christians and for the Church? And, secondly, Paul's words about those Jews who did not recognise Jesus as Messiah: "They have the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenant and the legislation and the worship and the promises, they have the fathers and from them is Christ according to the flesh" (Rom:9.4-5) And further on: "they remain most dear to God", and "the gifts of the Lord are without repentance" (see Rom.11:28-29).

Accepting these points, we can understand the words of a famous Protestant theologian: "there are now many good contacts between the Catholic Church and many Protestant churches, between the Secretariate for Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches, there is a daily increasing number of mixed working groups all over the world, the ecumenical movement is driven by the Spirit of the Lord, but do not forget, there is only one really important, deep ecumenical question: that is our relation to Israel". (4)

It is true that Christians have overlooked and neglected both facts - the importance of this Jewish existence and the words of Paul. Now, under the influence of several events, they are beginning to understand the meaning of these two data, we must pose the question of the relation between the Church and Judaism, on the theological level. This is necessary to form a deep religious conviction, from which stems a strongly founded social behaviour. The question is: how can we reconcile this universalism of the Church's mission with recognition of Jewish identity, and its particular place in the salvation plan of the Lord? Today we are only at the beginning of a serious approach to this problem, so I cannot give a definite answer.

But, let us honestly try to find a solution.

a) The well known traditional solution was simply the conversion of the Jews to the Church. In the darkest times of Church history Jews were given no choice but conversion - or persecution and death. Many resisted and chose death or persecution. In other, less violent times, Christians saw the only solution in conversion. It was during these times that they forgot that Jesus was a Jew and that Paul had spoken about a mystery of Israel. This attitude, nevertheless, showed a deep conviction - that there is a special link between the Church and Judaism, and that the plan of God would not be fulfilled without the participation of the Jews. Only they simply translated the word "mystery" by conversion.

b) The Vatican Council struggled with this problem. In the first scheme for a declaration, there was nothing about conversion, - in a later proposal the hope was expressed that the Jews would join the Church but this was rejected and replaced by the more eschatological sentence, in which the words of the prophet Sophonias were quoted: "In company with the prophets and the same apostle (Paul), the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, in which all the peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and 'serve Him with one accord'" (See Soph: 3.9; Is.66:23; Ps.65:4; Rom.11:11-32). This is certainly a more biblical approach, it is an expression of the eschatological expectation, common to Jews and Christians, but it leaves the question open, how the relation between the Church and Judaism must be seen.

c) Since the Council several Catholic theologians have expressed their opinion, that in the Christian attitude towards Judaism the intention of Christians may not be the conversion of the Jews. Among others, Professor Schelkle of Tübingen, German; Professor Hruby of Paris and Msgr. Oesterreicher of Seton Hall University have spoken in this sense. And the guidelines for Catholic-Jewish relations, issued by the Secretariate for Catholic-Jewish relations in the United States, declares: "It is understood that proselytising is to be carefully avoided in dialogue". There is, of course, a difference between a sincere conversion and proselytism in the derogatory sense of the word. Proselytism has had, especially in Jewish history, a positive and very meaningful sense, but today it has in general, a negative meaning in so far as conversions are sought by unfair means, and not by free conviction. Respecting the freedom of personal decision and conviction, I think we must always accept the possibility of a conversion; and, as Christians, we will consider a Jew who becomes a Christian as one who, receiving the grace of God anticipates an eschatological event. This then, should not be a conversion in the accepted view of abandoning his Jewish faith and tradition, but the accomplishment in full consciousness of all the authentic values of his Jewish faith. Because of past persecutions, the position of these people is very difficult, they bear the burden of centuries of misunderstanding and nevertheless they have a special vocation in the Church. But this is different from the attitude of the Church as such towards Judaism. Here we have to count with other elements of divine revelation.

d) A solution of the problem of the relation between the Church and Judaism has been proposed by some Jewish and Christian

theologians. Rosensweig, among others, gives this solution: there are two covenants. One for Jews, based on the revelation on Mount Sinai, and another, for the Gentiles, based on the New Testament and the Noachitic commandments. But this seems an unacceptable solution for two reasons:

1) Christians in their identity and self-awareness are convinced that they participate in the covenant of the Lord with Abraham and Moses and they consider the Old Testament - the Hebrew Bible - as sacred to them as the New Testament. To deny this would mean the acceptance of the Marcionite tendency, and

2) There are not two covenants, I would say that there is only one covenant, as there is only one God and one revelation and one plan of God. But the single covenant has been renewed, and we Christians believe it has been renewed in Jesus in a unique and definite way.

Here I want to add a word on the people of God. The Vatican Declaration does not use the word people of God, when it speaks about the Jews after the coming of Christ. However, in another document, the dogmatic constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), it speaks in number 16 about the Jews as "the people, which remain most dear to God".... In the *expensio modorum*, in the evaluation of the *modi* on the Declaration concerning the Jews, there it is said: the Secretariate for Christian Unity (which dealt with this question) does not intend to decide in what sense the Jewish people remains the people dear to God. Several theologians, such as Demann, and Congar, explain that Jews, according to the Christian view, still remain the people of God. The explanation then is that the coming of Jesus caused a schism which divided this people of God. But there still remains the question of the relation between the two parts of the people of God.

e) Another solution of this problem has been given by James Parkes (5) and others, who say that Judaism is aimed at the people as a social body, while Christianity is directed to the individual. Thus they have their own place in the plan of God. But this view exaggerates in stressing too much one aspect of both Judaism and Christianity.

f) Before coming to my final point, let me say a word about the necessity of conversion. When we rethink this word in its original meaning, then conversion, *teshuvah*, is necessary for both Jews and Christians. It means the conversion of the heart to the Lord, to obey His commandments more faithfully. It does not mean changing from one religion to another, but discovering more clearly God's plan of salvation, and following the ways of His providence. This teaching about conversion is certainly very much needed by Christians, particularly in their behaviour and attitude towards Jews. Radical conversion is needed. In this attitude of sincere conversion and of real penance, we will, perhaps, receive the grace of discovering the mystery of Israel and its relation to the Church.

5) In my last point, I will try to indicate a possible view on the dialectic relation between the Church and the Jewish People. Here

I borrow largely from a recent article of Professor Hruby from Paris, "Le Judaïsme dans le plan du salut appes l'avènement du Christ" (6) There are two fundamental theses which must both be seriously considered.

a) The Church has a universal mission. At the beginning of her existence she was exclusively composed of Jews who had recognized Jesus as Messiah, then she opened the door to the Gentiles to participate in the covenant of God with Israel, which had come to fulfillment in Jesus. The majority of the Jewish people, living outside Palestine for the most part, did not follow this movement. But this non-acceptation of the Christian message, according to Paul was "for your sake" (Rom. 11:28) for the sake of the Gentiles. It is considered as the condition of the salvation of the Gentiles. The Church has the mission of preaching the Gospel to the whole world, and it would be wrong to exclude the Jews deliberately. - it would be unjust not to present the Gospel message to the whole of mankind the Jews included. (See how the Gospels and the apostles speak of this mission first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles). This, I think, is true in principle, but it does not give approval to all proselytism and conversion activities such as have taken place in the past. So in the concrete situation it is clear that, first of all, a real and deep conversion of Christians themselves is needed, and even then the question of the concrete presentation of a message of love must be considered. It has to be conveyed much more in acts than in words. As a fellow Dutchman once said: "for the first hundred years, Christians must be silent in their contact with Jews, and just listen and learn."

But I think, that we must be honest in this point, too, and say that it belongs to the Christians self-understanding and identity to live and to preach the Gospel of the New Testament everywhere.

b) But there is a second thesis to be considered: a thesis of equal importance, but scarcely seen by Christians, and this is the other part of the dialectic relation, namely: Israel has its own authenticity and identity which it preserves, and this, it does according to the plan of God whose gifts are without repentance, and whose call is irrevocable. It is here that Paul speaks of a mystery, (Rom. 11:25). Israel is a concrete, complex and religious reality outside the Christian order, has its own function in the plan of divine salvation, that is intended finally to include the whole of mankind in a new heaven and a new earth, when all will serve the Lord with one accord (Soph. 3:9) and the Lord will be "everything to everyone" (1 Cor. 15:28). In true fidelity to its vocation and election, Israel will survive. The very specific existence of the Jewish people, with its own characteristics, is a sign of God's fidelity to His grace and His gifts, always with a view to the final accomplishment of all the promises. Christians must really and seriously recognise and respect this identity and authenticity of Judaism, in order to be faithful to their own beliefs, based on the whole Bible.

Accepting these two poles of the dialectic relation, we understand that a certain tension will always exist between them: a tension which will find its solution only in the eschatological realization of the plan of God, when the whole people of God with all mankind will form one unity. There are several consequences of this

view on which, however, I will not digress now, but which I can only mention in passing:

- 1) The recognition of the Jewish identity with its essential aspects, is, of course, the first point
- 2) Conversations and dialogue between Jews and Christians must take place in a really ecumenical, unselfish spirit.
- 3) Christians must seriously listen and study what they can, and must learn what Judaism can mean for them. That Jews are not eager to listen to Christians is understandable after centuries of bitter experience.
- 4) There is a large field of collaboration open to Christians and Jews, with relation to the problem of faith in the world, with relation to the final and complete accomplishment of the Covenant between God and man.

These are only a few indications which need to be worked out.

After the events of 1967, and after reflection upon its implications, it must be admitted that some aspects of the Jewish-Christian relationship received new light and new insistence: a new reason for speaking about a fresh and more explicit situation in which we feel that we are beginning to realize better that divine mystery of which Paul said:

"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor? Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid? For in Him and through Him and to Him are all things: to Him be glory forever. Amen". (Rom.11:33-36)

N o t e s . . .

- 1) Michel De Goedt, Foi au Christ et dialogues du chrétien,
Paris, Declée De Brouwer, 1967, pag. 145-147
- 2) Bernard Lambert, Le problème oecuménique, Paris 1962, pag. 599
- 3) H. Cazelles, La Légitimité du Judaïsme d'après le Christianisme
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- 4) Karl Barth in a private talk in Rome, end of 1966
- 5) A. Roy Eckardt, Elder and Younger Brother, New York, 1967,
p.82 ss.
- 6) K. Hruby, Le judaïsme dans le plan du salut après l'avènement
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