

« **prophetae, inimici, testes** ».

**Ps 59,12 and the Proof by Prophecy in *City of God***

Alban Massie (Brussels)

As can be seen from his vast and varied bibliography, Fr Robert Dodaro's work has concentrated on the question of Augustinian social virtues, especially as seen in the books of the *City of God*. The theme of Augustine's theological reflections on the Jewish people, and on Judaism, is nowhere specifically addressed. But Dodaro's studies on humility and charity, especially as these touch upon the notion of « sacramentum » as a « mystery » can provide us with a very fruitful approach to this topic. In Augustine's theology of history, as is well known, the Jewish people play a key role as witnesses to Christian truth. Psalm 59,12 in *City of God* is the premier text by which Augustine reads this lesson. With these ideas in mind, I would like to turn our attention to a thought of Robert Dodaro's that appears in his essay, « The Secret Justice of God and the Gift of Humility. » Dodaro writes :

[...] if properly received, the gift of humility, which God offers, can somehow be found among Jews and others outside <of> the Christian belief structure and sacramental system. Some among Augustine's writings about Judaism illustrate his reasoning on this point<sup>1</sup>.

Augustine, in other words, recognizes the holiness of the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament as well as that of the wise in various non-biblical, non-Christian cultures. How is such holiness possible ? It cannot be derived from some undifferentiated, cosmic point of view but is related specifically to the incarnation of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Dodaro strikingly associates the Justice of God, its hiddenness or « secrecy », and the humility necessary for salvation through the individual's participation in the divine mystery, that is, in the *sacramentum* of the incarnation and redemption. When I studied the foundational text for Augustine's theology of the Jewish people, in *Contra Faustum manichaeum*, I encountered the phrase *occulta iustitia Dei* there when Augustine expressed the contrast between the double status that he attributes to the Jewish people. The Jews, he says, are both the *gens prophetica* in the time before Christ, and the *populus testis veritatis* in the time of the Church. Narrating his anti-Manichaean figurative reading of the Old Testament, wherein all the *facta* and *dicta* of Israel's history point ahead to Christ and his Church, Augustine considers Scripture's messianic prophecies and remarks :

---

1. R. DODARO, « The Secret Justice of God and the Gift of Humility », *Augustinian Studies*, 34/1 (2003), p. 83-96 ; here, 87.

2. It is especially the case of Job «who belonged, not by earthly but heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above ». The criterium to this belonging is very clear : « it is not to be supposed that this was granted to any one, unless *the one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus* (cf. 2 Tm 2, 5), was divinely revealed to him » (Ciu. XVIII, 47).

the Jews knew those christs of theirs, while they still hoped that the one would come by whom they would at last be set free. But, *blinded by the hidden justice of God*, they did not understand Christ's weakness, in which he died for us, because they considered only his power<sup>3</sup>.

In our time together this afternoon, I would like to consider how Augustine's speaking about the Jewish people in relationship to the church, does not put them actually outside of the sacramental system. Augustine does not specifically argue this point, but his understanding of the essential role of the *judaica gens* as part of the proof by prophecy suggests that the Jews can, in his terms, be viewed as a sacramental people, I mean having a necessary mediating role for the nations to accept salvation and for the Church itself to understand its own identity. My meaning will become clearer as we examine Augustine's interpretation of Ps 59, 12 within the context of his citation of it in Book 18 of the *City of God*.

I will first consider his use of this verse in the *City of God* ; then, I will explore the source of this statement about the Jewish people as it is found in *Contra Faustum manichaeum*. In conclusion, I shall suggest that the gap between the the Jewish people as a prophetic nation (in the past) and as a witness people (in the « present ») can be bridged by the augustinian notion of *sacramentum* as linked to his idea of incarnation, that is, as linked to the idea, articulated by Dodaro, of the humility necessary for receiving salvation through the mediation of powerful signs, humility which should be the premier virtue for the Church in its *via peregrina*.

### 1. Ps 59, 12 and the role of Jews in the *City of God*

In its original literary context and in its Hebrew version, Ps 59 speaks to the situation of David threatened by Saul's spies: *Do not slay them, lest my people forget; Scatter them by Thy power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield.* (NJB). Endangered, desperate, pursued by these enemies, David cries out for salvation. Verse 12 refers to David's enemies. They must not be destroyed, the text says. To experience God's might at his own benefits, the psalmist must take patience, wich is the principal virtue for men experiencing sufferings because it makes hope growing for salvation. This is how I would summarize Rashi's interpretation of this difficult psalm.

The Septuaginta, by contrast, specifically mentions the *Law* in connection with the verb *forget*, which the Greek translator, or his *Vorlage*, added because of the syntactical uncertainty of the word « *people* » whether as subject or as object of the verb. This verse thus becomes : *Slay them not, lest they forget thy law; scatter them by thy power*<sup>4</sup>. Augustine's later Latin text follows the LXX.

We can notice also that the Hebrew verb *nuah* (*scatter*) also appears in Genesis 4, 11 with reference to Cain. The Jerusalem Bible accordingly proposes this interpretation of the

---

3. *C. Faust.* XII, 44, tr. Teske, new City Press, 2007, p. 155. Cf. P. FREDRIKSEN, « *Excaecati occulta justitia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism* », *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3 (1995), p. 299-324.

4. This lesson can be found in Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, in Bohairic (this psalm lacks in Alexandrinus' recension), in the manuscript of Verona, its translation in latin (Lat 11947). Other recensions (Ralph's edition, strangely, for instance) have *name* instead of *law*.

psalm's verse : « Like Cain, pagans are maintained . . . in order to be the witnesses to divine justice ». This note can find support in verses 6 and 9 of Psalm 59, which evoke « the nations » as the psalmist's enemies. But this reading absolutely contrasts with the augustinian interpretation, which, refers, Augustine says, not to pagans but to Jews. The *vox psalmi* for Augustine is always and everywhere the *uox Christi*, in this specific instance the voice of Christ suffering in the flesh during his Passion, that is in his members, the church, during this era.

This reading of Ps 59, 12 is considered as Augustine's signature verse for his understanding of the theological status of the Jewish people as summarized in the *City of God*. In that book he defends the superiority of the biblical prophecies of Christ to those of pagan oracles, because the biblical prophecies are still read by the church's « enemies », that is, by the Jews :

For us, indeed, those [prophecies] suffice which are quoted from the books of our enemies, to whom we make our acknowledgment, on account of this testimony which, in spite of themselves, they contribute by their possession of these books, while they themselves are dispersed among all nations, wherever the Church of Christ is spread abroad. For a prophecy about this thing was sent before in the Psalms, which they also read, where it is written, *My God, His mercy shall prevent me. My God hath shown me concerning my enemies, that you shall not slay them, lest they should at last forget your law: disperse them in you might.* (Ps 58, 12) Therefore God has shown the Church in her enemies the Jews the grace of His compassion, since, as saith the apostle, *their offence is the salvation of the Gentiles* (Rm 11, 11). And therefore He has not slain them, that is, He has not let the knowledge that they are Jews be lost in them, although they have been conquered by the Romans, lest they should forget the law of God, and their testimony should be of no avail in this matter of which we treat. But it was not enough that he should say, *Slay them not, lest they should at last forget your law*, unless he had also added, *Disperse them*; because if they had only been in their own land with that testimony of the Scriptures, and not every where, certainly the Church which is everywhere could not have had them as witnesses among all nations to the prophecies which were sent before concerning Christ<sup>5</sup>.

---

5. *City of God*, XVIII, 46, CCL 48 p. 645 : « nobis quidem illae sufficiunt, quae de nostrorum inimicorum codicibus proferuntur, quos agnoscimus propter hoc testimonium, quod nobis inuiti perhibent eosdem codices habendo atque seruando, per omnes gentes etiam ipsos esse dispersos, quaque uersum Christi ecclesia dilatatur. nam prophetia in Psalmis, quos legunt etiam, de hac re praemissa est, ubi scriptum est: «deus meus, misericordia eius praeueniet me; deus meus demonstraui mihi in inimicis meis, ne occideris eos, ne quando obliuiscantur legem tuam; disperse eos in uirtute tua». demonstraui ergo deus ecclesiae in eius inimicis Iudaeis gratiam misericordiae suae, quoniam, sicut dicit apostolus, «delictum illorum salus gentibus»; et ideo non eos occidit, id est non in eis perdidit quod sunt Iudaei, quamuis a Romanis fuerint deuicti et oppressi, ne oblitum legem dei ad hoc, de quo agimus, testimonium nihil ualerent. Ideo parum fuit, ut diceret: «ne occideris eos, ne quando obliuiscantur legem tuam», nisi adderet etiam: «disperse eos»; quoniam si cum isto testimonio scripturarum in sua tantummodo terra, non ubique essent, profecto ecclesia, quae ubique est, eos prophetiarum, quae de Christo praemissae sunt, testes in omnibus gentibus habere non posset. »

Augustine was not the first Christian thinker to refer Ps 59, 12 to the Jewish people . Tertullien had done so before him, as had both Hilary and Jérôme<sup>6</sup>. The proof from prophecy is, moreover, universal in the Christian ancient apologetics, whether these apologetics are directed against Jews, against pagans, or against other Christians such as the gnostics . In this particular instance as elsewhere, Christian interpreters took the Jews' texts to foretell their ruin, both past and continuing . Further, for Augustine, Jewish antiquity, coupled with current Jewish hostility, served as a precious validation of the prophecies' authenticity : this Jewish posture toward Christianity proved that the manifestly « Christian » prophecies preserved in Jewish texts were not placed there, after the fact, by later Christians. The antiquity of Jewish tradition, in other words, demonstrated the antiquity of Christian tradition ; and this antiquity in turn indexed Christian truth. The earlier Latin African author Lactantius provides a perfect example of the strategic use of this proof from prophecy, and this author was certainly one of the Bishop of Hippo's inspirations.<sup>7</sup> But Augustine also asserted that there was an enormous difference between Judaism and all the other religious cultures of his time. This was so not only by virtue of monotheism, which Judaism, uniquely, held in common with « true » Christianity.<sup>8</sup>, but of course also by virtue as well of the fleshly – that is, Jewish – incarnation of God's Word, the defining criterion of Christian orthodoxy especially as concerns the theology of salvation. (Dodaro has illuminated this point for the polemics with Pelagians<sup>9</sup>.) The Jews, to be sure, failed to apprehend these twin facts. But because Christ descended from David according to the flesh (cf. Rm 1, 3), Jews themselves were accordingly, through their very history, intimately associated with Christians in a way that Manichees or pagans never could be. Thus, against any Marcionite temptation to polarize these two « scriptural » populations, Christians and Jews, Augustine reminds his readers that the earliest Christians WERE Jews. For all these reasons, the Jewish people have a unique status, « set apart » from all those other religious communities that Augustine frequently examines, most especially in *The City of God*.

We have already seen that Augustine is fully heir to Christian traditions *contra iudaeos* , but he does not remain with them. He is in effect the first Christian thinker to define clearly the implications of the understanding of Ps 59,12 as a *testimonium aduersus iudaeos* that refers to the situation of the Jewish people vis-a-vis the other nations in the present day. Augustine links the Jews' foretold wandering – their current « exile » -- to their unique God-given mission : to bear witness to God's truth, that is Christian Truth, through the *proprium*, the lived fact of Jewish religion enacted according to the letter of Mosaic law with its mandated practices (I agree here with Paula Fredriksen's thesis). Augustine thus theologises

---

6. Voir par exemple TERT., *Adu. Marc.* 3, 23, 4, CSEL 1, p. 417 : « N'est-ce pas lui qui, dans le psaume cinquante huit, demande à son Père la dispersion de ce peuple ? » (« [...] qui et in psalmo quinquagesimo octauo dispersionem eis postulat a patre: *disperge eos in uirtute tua* ». Cf. *Adu. Iud.* 13, 28) ; HIL., *Com. Ps.* 58, 12 ; HIER., *Com. Os.* 2, 9, 16.

7. LACTANCE expose plusieurs *testimonia* dans le livre 4 des *Institutions divines* « pour faire sentir leur erreur à ceux qui s'efforcent de rejeter l'Écriture en lui reprochant d'être toute nouvelle et de fabrication récente. [...] Nous n'inventons rien, nous n'ajoutons rien » (*Inst. diuin.* 4, 5, 9 ; 4, 16, 11). Mais il récuse la force de cet argument à cause du particularisme de la religion juive et de la morale issue des lois mosaïques, et insiste sur les autres catégories d'oracles, en particulier païens. Cf. A. MASSIE, *Peuple prophétique et nation témoin. Le peuple juif dans le Contra Faustum manichaeum de saint Augustin*, Paris, Études augustiniennes, 2011, p. 347, n. 229.

8. Voir déjà *Gen. c. man.* 1, 23, 39 ; *De uera rel.* 5, 9 ; 27, 50 ; *De doct. chr.* 2, 28, 43, avec Rm 9, 5 ; etc.

9. Cf. R. DODARO, « *Omnes haeretici negant Christum in carne uenisse* (Aug., *serm.* 183.9.13): Augustine on the Incarnation as Criterion for Orthodoxy », *Augustinian Studies*, 38/1 (2007), p. 163-174.

the arguments based on proof from prophecy by tying them to the very existence of the Church, its reading of scripture, its moral and sacramental life, because of the signum/res references between Mosaic Law and Christian rites.

Augustine's evocation of the Jewish people in the *City of God* might seem subordinate to the project announced by his sub-title, the divine city *against the pagans, contra paganos*. In fact it is strategic.

In an empire grown increasingly Christian, but which also has to explain to itself the vicissitudes of history – doesn't Rome's fall signal the triumph of the secular ? – Augustine discerns the simultaneous existence of two cities, one divine, one diabolical. His reflections upon the ways that divine providence operates in the world and in the Church lead him to consider the inanity of pagan cult compared with Christianity, which is for him the unique universal pathway of salvation. He accordingly considers as well the means by which a person can attain his destination, the city of God. Augustine thus views history from two perspectives . The first we might call « external, », that history understood according to the religious principles and customs, that had ordered the development of Roman life,. This perspective in turn compelled him to ponder what was the true religion of God's city and what that of the devil : this theme directs his discussion in part one, books 1 through ten. The second perspective, an « internal » one, is founded upon the realization of God's plan, Augustine presents this plan according to the stages of salvation history that he sees revealed in holy scripture, This second perspective informs the following section of his opus, from books 11 to 22.

For instance, in the first of the two parts of the *City of God*, Augustine at one point mentions Jews in order to compare their prayers to those of the Romans (IV, 34) ; at another, he reports Seneca's statement about Jewish singularity (VI, 11). These two examples serve an obviously apologetic function. The first underscores the connection between God and his people as compared with the throng of false gods worshipped by the Romans. The lesson of Israelite history affirms that earthly happiness is a function of heavenly or eternal happiness, which is to be found only in communion with God. This argument touches upon the fundamental reasons for Roman prosperity and civic virtues, But it also touches on the ambiguities inherent in the pursuit of a happiness founded upon imperial domination. Accordingly, continues Augustine, the current unhappiness of the exiled Jewish people is also a source of instruction for (now Christian) Rome :

And now that they are dispersed through almost all lands and nations, it is through the providence of that one true God; that whereas the images, altars, groves, and temples of the false gods are everywhere overthrown, and their sacrifices prohibited, it may be shown from their books how this has been foretold by their prophets so long before<sup>10</sup>.

---

10. *City of God*, IV, 34, CCL 47 p. 128 : « et nunc quod per omnes fere terras, gentesque dispersi sunt, illius unius veri Dei prouidentia est, ut, quod deorum falsorum usquequaque simulacra arae, luci templa

Here, the argument from prophecy draws particularly on the idea of Jewish « sins », which are impious curiosity (a particular fault of pagan philosophers), idol worship, misunderstanding the Christ : these sins all return us to our opening idea : the « hidden justice of God », which is the source of eternal happiness if one receives it – that is, this hidden justice -- with humility. But the Jews, says Augustine, wanted to disregard this justice, as they disregarded Christ. For, as Robert Dodaro has written, « *occulta iustitia Dei* is another name for Christ ».

Seneca, on the other hand, says Augustine, understood neither the significance of the Jewish religion – for Seneca, the Sabbath was noxiously anti-social, a old and venerable pagan anti-Jewish slur – nor the significance of their wide-flung dispersion. Augustine attributes this to the Stoician's ignorance of « the ways of God, » that is, of the allegorical meaning of the Sabbath laws, which relate to « the mystery of eternal life<sup>11</sup> ». We might also note Seneca's use of the phrase *sceleretissima gens* (fr. 41, Haas) which Augustine quotes without offense or apology. Augustine uses this same pejorative adjective – « villainous » in English – when maligning the Donatists<sup>12</sup>, but he also can use it as well against the Jews. More precisely, he uses *sceleretissima* to characterize, not the nation, i.e. the “nature” of the Jews, but rather the deeds of Jews who did not or who do not believe in Christ. This is a distinction with a great difference. Once again, Augustine refuses to forget that Christ was born of fleshly Israel (Rm 9.5), and that the Church was initially formed by Jews who, together with *gentiles*, were united through the humility of faith in divine mercy. The secret justice of God, in other words, encompasses more than predestination to perdition : it allows scope as well for an individual's deeds. Human responsibility accords with this divine justice, even if one of the results of this justice might be blindness for *praecedenta merita*, fore-going deserts (cf. *City of God*, XVIII, 35), which Augustine elsewhere identifies as *occulta peccata*, secret sins (cf. *C. Faust.* XIII, 11<sup>13</sup>).

In sum : Augustine's use of Israel in the first part of the *City of God* , both with respect to the people of the Old Testament and with respect to his own Jewish contemporaries, allows us to affirm that, for him, the history of Israel constitutes a decisive criterion in the discernment of true religion in social life. The secret justice of God is an explanation of Providence which rules history, but for Augustine it provokes human freedom to participate to it.

In Part Two of *City of God*., Augustine structures his account of God's actions in history by appeal to the traditional and symbolic scheme of the [seven] ages of the world..He does so to emphasize two points : the historical course of the two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon ; and the importance of the prophecies up to their realization with coming of Christ in the flesh..He examines the biblical prophecies in book 17, exploring their three-fold reference : to the

---

euertuntur et sacrificia prohibentur, de codicibus eorum probetur, quem ad modum hoc fuerit tanto ante prophetatum ».

11. *Ciu.* VI, 11, *CCL* 47, p. 183 : « de sacramentis Iudaeorum, uel cur uel quatenus instituta sint auctoritate diuina, ac post modum a populo Dei, cui uitae aeternae mysterium reuelatum est... »

12. Contre les donatistes : cf. *C. Ep. Parm.* 3, 18, 23 ; *Epist.* 52, 3 ; contre les Juifs incroyables coupables de *sceleretissimae* persecutiones, cf. *C. adu. Leg.* 2, 17.

13. Cf. A. MASSIE, *Peuple prophétique et nation témoin*, p. 481-483.

earthly Jerusalem, to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to both.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, book 18 takes up the history of the two cities with fleshly Israel's exile among the nations, which marks at the same time both the opposition of the two cities and their mutual entanglement in time. Israel's return from their Babylonian exile leads to a renewal of prophecy, which Augustine examines in order to affirm the superiority of biblical oracles to pagan ones, most especially to the Sybilline Oracle. The authority of « the oracles of God entrusted to Israelites<sup>15</sup> » derives in part from their chronological anteriority. Established on the foundation of the election of the Jewish people as a nation of prophets, this authority is reinforced in light of Christ's advent, whence Israel becomes the bearer of their own prophecies.. In effect, Christ turns upside-down the relation between the Israelites and the Word of God. In Christ, their prophecies were realized and the Church was formed, first of all by Jews who believed in him ; thereafter, the church was spread throughout all the nations, wherever unbelieving Jews, now in exile, could be found. For Augustine, the fact that Jews *qua* Jews were not and have not been destroyed is an act of divine Providence : they now witness to the authenticity of their own prophecies, which include their witness to the truth of Christianity and to the life of the church.

Ps 59, 12 thus enters into Augustine's discussion as a new application of his argument from prophecy : the verse explains the providential reason on account of which Jews are dispersed among the nations : in their current condition, Jews facilitate the acknowledgment of their Law and its function in the history of salvation. At the same time, they provoke the recognition of God's faithfulness, the same God who gave them the Law and who saves according to his grace, exactly as those ancient Israelite personages expressed this justice, concealed within the Old Testament.

Augustine's allusions to the Jewish people would not be as striking were it not for his statement in 21.24, affirming that the Jews could be predestined to glory, no less than those pagans who, thanks to the Jews, have converted.

The Bible's language is decisive for Augustine, especially when compared with the oracles of pagan culture ; but this is especially so in this instance.<sup>16</sup> : evidently, one can truly speak of Augustine's Jewish contemporaries, in his view, as themselves constituting a *sacramentum* in its paradigmatic sense within the divine economy, wherein God's hidden justice is accomplished as grace/as a gift, and is fulfilled in the coming of Christ in the flesh, and consequently in the coming of his church.

*Sacramentum* in this connection would also have the sense wherein the sin of the Jews represents in particular the difficulties of humanity in general, in accordance with the justice of God. A French theologian, J. Clémence, while recognizing that Augustine does not himself employ the term, was able to speak of the « sacrament of sinfulness » with respect to original sin :

---

14. Cf. *Ciu.* XVII, 3, 2, *BA* 36, p. 347-349.

15. *Ciu.* XVIII, 41, 3, *BA* 36, p. 629.

16. Voir l'exemple de l'éclipse du soleil à Rome analysé à partir des données de la Passion du Christ (cf. *City of God* III, 15).

Nous dirons que l'obéissance de l'homme eût été le sacrement de son humilité, que sa désobéissance fut le sacrement de son orgueil et que la concupiscence charnelle et le mal physique avec son paroxysme, la mort, constituent le sacrement du péché<sup>17</sup>. We say that the man's [Adam's] obedience would have been the sacrament of his humility, that his disobedience was the sacrament of his pride and that fleshly desire and physical infirmity together with its ultimate paroxysme, Death, constitute the sacrament of sin.

Sacrament, according to Clemence, is used for universalizing an experience of God, negative, here, and symbolizes the human experience in the sacred earea, which could be perceived in history of humankind. It is not far away of the signum-res scheme, in *Doctrina Christiana*, for example.

The hardening of the Jewish people [to Christian claims about Christ], in this modern theological view, would thus constitute a special sacrament, the sacrament of human transgressive liberty in history. It seems to me that such a view could serve to reinforce Robert Dodaro's thesis : namely, that for Augustine, humility is absolutely necessary for salvation to be realized, and that humility for Augustine is fundamentally tied to the sacraments of incarnation and redemption. We note that already in book XVII, Augustine caractérises *Israelitae carnales*, inhabitants of the earthly Jérusalem, by reference to Paul's statement in Rm 10, 3 : *Not recognising God's saving justice they have tried to establish their own, instead of submitting to the saving justice of God*. Augustine accordingly states that the justice of God is that justice « which God, who alone is just, and who alone justifies, gives to man ». He continues, that the Jews wanted to achieve their own justice by themselves rather than that justice « bestowed by Him [...] because they are proud, and think they are able to please God by their own power, not with that which comes from God<sup>18</sup> ». But the negative notion of *sacramentum* does not take account of the sense that Augustine confers on the lives of his Jewish contemporaries with respect to Christian sacramentality, that is to say that the Jewish people is not a simple symbol of God's rejection, or a model for church's enemies. The Jewish paradigm is and stays *singular*.

## **2. A defense of the Jewish People and Sacramentality in *Contra Faustum manichaeum***

We know that it was in the course of his struggle against the Manichees that Augustine first formulated his thoughts on the Jewish people as witness; and that, if his evocation of Ps 59, 12 on this point was much later, his formulation of his ideas occurred early on. The idea itself indeed appears already in the *Contra Faustum manichaeum*, toward the year 403. Against the Manichaean bishop, whose *Capitula* urged that Christians should reject the Old Testament, Augustin demonstrated the value of the argument from prophecy : *omnia sonant Christum*, « the scriptures everywhere speak of Christ. ». The history of the Jewish people as recounted in the Old Testament, he urged, prophesied the life of Christ and of his church. And

---

17. J. CLEMENCE, « Saint Augustin et le péché originel », *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 70, 1948, p. 735.

18. *Ciu.* XVII, 4, 3, *CCL* 48, p. 557 : « [...] ex quibus sunt etiam carnales Israelitae, terrenae Hierusalem ciues terrigenae, qui ut dicit apostolus, «ignorantes Dei iustitiam» (id est, quam dat homini deus, qui solus est iustus atque iustificans) «et suam uolentes constituere» (id est uelut a se sibi partam, non ab illo inpartitam) «iustitiae dei non sunt subiecti», utique quia superbi, de suo putantes, non de dei, posse placere se Deo ».

this prophetic quality characterized not only their books, but – and this is Augustine unique contribution – also and indeed the entire Jewish people themselves :

(...) the providential plan of (Christ's) humility, by which he was born and suffered as a man, was for good reason foretold so long ago by prophets, by means of a prophetic nation, a prophetic people, and a prophetic kingdom<sup>19</sup>.

In this plan of Christ's humility, the figure of « the Jews » can be negative as well as positive : Augustine also associates Cain and Ham with contemporary Jews. After the murder of his brother Abel – a figura for the death of Christ -- Cain received a protective sign from God, lest anyone harm him. (cf. Gn 4, 15). « Why, » asks Augustine, « did God not permit attempts of the lives of Jews ? » « Since the Jewish people has not perished in the whole of this time that passes under the number of seven days, the Christian Faithful see well enough the subjection that the Jews merited when in the pride of their kingdom they killed the Lord<sup>20</sup> ». Augustin associates Cain's exile from Eden with the Jews' exile from their earthly kingdom, effected by Rome. The « mark of Cain » in Augustine's typology functions as a symbol summarizing those cultural elements – synagogue liturgies, domestic rites, food laws – which in the now-Christian world serve to set the Jews apart. Further, his exegesis of Gn 9, 21-27 – the nakedness of drunken Noah, the respectful modesty of Ham's brothers, the disrespect of Ham – are given new significance when Augustine interprets this passage in light of the Jews. Noah blesses Shem and Japhet and curses Ham and his posterity : « Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave ! » This curse, writes Augustine, is borne currently by the Jews, whose condition now broadcasts the prophecy :

For what else is that people today but a librarian (*scriniarius*) for Christians, who bear the law and the prophets to testify to the freedom of the Church, that we reverence as a mystery what that people preaches in its literal sense<sup>21</sup> ?

The Jewish people is the guarantor of the universal salvation offered through the grace of Christ the son of David, something that no other people or culture could represent. The witness people, accordingly, is charged with a mission in service to biblical interpretation, which goes well beyond a simple apologetic proof of the authenticity of Scripture. By preserving their rites in their literal modality, argues Augustine, Jews give fleshly witness to the truth of the Christians' spiritual cult.

Augustine emphasizes the unitary and progressive sweep of God's saving plan in history, placing at the center of the divine economy the incarnation of the Word sprung from the people of David. Furthermore,, Augustine's position on the Jewish people is open-ended :: he refuses to speculate on the details of the Jews' « secret sins » that propelled their

---

19. *C. Faust.*, XII, 46, *CSEL* 25/1, p. 375 : « [...] non sine causa dispensationem humilitatis eius, qua humanitus natus et passus est, a prophetis per propheticam gentem, per propheticum populum, per propheticum regnum tanto ante praedictam [...] ».

20. *C. Faust.* XII, 12, p. 341 : « [...] hoc toto tempore, quod septenario dierum numero uoluitur, magis quia non interit gens Iudaea satis adpareat fidelibus christianis, quam subiectionem meruerint, qui superbo regno dominum interfecerunt. »

21. *C. Faust.* XII, 23, p. 351 : « Quid est enim aliud hodieque gens ipsa nisi quaedam scriniaria christianorum, baiulans legem et prophetas ad testimonium adsertionis ecclesiae, ut nos honoremus per sacramentum, quod nuntiat illa per litteram? »

murderous attitude toward Jesus (the *massa peccati* concerns all the humankind) ; nor does he speculate on the ultimate destiny of those whom God « hardened ». Nor does his attitude preclude in the least the participation of the Jews in *Verus Israel*. The Condition is only to become able to recognise God's salvation, without hypocrisy. We can notice that Augustine prefers to speak of *verus israelita* in reference to Jesus's saying in Jn 1, 47: *here is a true Israelite, sine dolo*). Augustine does not forget the responsibility of each and every sinner, mired in the *massa peccati*, for the death of Christ. The first Christians were Jews, he insists against the Manichees ; and the Church represents, in principle, the coming together of both Jews and gentiles in Christ.

In *Contra Faustum, further*, Augustine developed a sacramental theology against the manichaeian illumination rites and their contempt for jewish and christian cults. It's there that he introduces for the first time his definition of a sacrament as a religious rite bounded by temporality :

What else are certain bodily sacraments but certain visible words – sacred, of course, but still changeable and temporal. [...] All these take place and pass away ; they sound and pass away. Yet the power that works through them remains constant, and the spiritual gift that is signified by them is eternal<sup>22</sup>.

This notion of *sacramentum* introduces an eschatological dimension. But because of his typological interpretation of the OT, Augustine underscores the necessity of recognizing and acknowledging the *res* already revealed for which the *sacramentum* conveys a sense. This is the reason why one can justifiably claim that the witness of the Jewish people to the sacred truth of scripture has a sacramental aspect. Those patriarchs who grasped the spiritual sense of the ancient law's rites, its *sacramenta*, its status as a prefigurement of Christ, could be said to have had Christ manifest to their minds., But for a reality to be *sacramentum*, there must be a correspondence between what it is and what it signifies. It's thus in this sense that the Jewish rites correspond to Christian sacramental reality:

Before the coming of Christ the flesh and blood of this sacrifice was promised by the likenesses of the victims ; in the Passion of Christ the promise was fulfilled in its reality ; after the ascension of Christ it is celebrated through the sacraments in its memory. And for this reason there is as great a difference between the sacrifices of the pagans and those of the Hebrews as there is between a mistaken imitation and a prefiguring that foretold what was to come<sup>23</sup>.

## Conclusion

---

22. *C. Faust.* XIX, 16, p. 513 : « Quid enim sunt aliud quaeque corporalia sacramenta nisi quaedam quasi uerba uisibilia, sacrosancta quidem uerum tamen mutabilia et temporalia ? Deus enim aeternus est, nec tamen aqua et omnis illa actio corporalis, quae agitur cum baptizamus et fit et transit, aeterna est ». Cf. *Conf.* XIII, 18, 23 ; *Io. eu. tr.* 80, 3.

23. *C. Faust.* XX, 21, p. 564 : « Huius sacrificii caro et sanguis ante aduentum Christi per uictimas similitudinum promittebatur, in passione Christi per ipsam ueritatem reddebatur, post ascensum Christi per sacramentum memoriae celebratur : ac per hoc tantum interest inter sacrificia paganorum et Hebraeorum, quantum inter imitationem errantem et praefigurationem praenuntiantem ».

The eucharistic cult of the Christians, Augustine thus argues, is in profound ways continuous with the cult of the Jews. By evoking this sacramental correspondence, Augustine grants to the contemporary witness of the Jewish people itself something of the character of a sacramental sign : In its warm embrace of the anagogical or eschatological meaning of the scriptures, Augustine sees in the Jewish practices singular but universal steps (useful signs) on the way to salvation. The Jews' denial of Christ, their fidelity to the law of Moses, and their hope in God's promises, reminds the Christian that the path of prophecy remains open still. It is in this last sense that one can understand the definition of the true sacrifice tendered in the *City of God*, and of the daily apprenticeship of the church, which « learns to offer itself through Him<sup>24</sup> ».

Modern theology still avails itself of the insights of Augustine. To what, then, today, does the Jewish people witness, since, happily, there is no question of assigning them the role of « librarians » for the church ? « To witness » means more than simply 'to give an account', but rather « to recount with one's whole being. » It pertains to the act of witnessing to incarnate the Absolute [...] *il s'agit dans le fait de témoigner de donner chair à l'Absolu* », writes J.-Ph. Pierron<sup>25</sup>. In his *Confessions*, the bishop of Hippo described himself as « a man... who bears everywhere the testimony of his sin, and the testimony that *you resist to the proud* (1 P 5, 5 ; Jc 4, 6) » (*Conf.* I, 1). It means positively that the confession of the human weakness, *confessio peccati*, opens the door to the *confessio laudis*. To continue these variations upon the Augustinian themes, a modern theologian might construe Jews-as-witness in the sense of an invitation to witness to the divine. In brief, in the 21st century no less than in the first, or the fourth, or the fifth, Christian theology interprets its own sacraments by appeal to this idea of « Jew » as « witness. » For such a project, the work of Robert Dodaro opens a pathway.

Alban Massie, sj

---

24. *City of God*, X, 20.

25. J.-Ph. PIERRON, « La question du témoignage dans les *Confessions* de saint Augustin », *RÉAug* 41 (1995), p. 259 (souligné par l'auteur).