

Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung

**The Babylonian Talmud, the Jerusalem Talmud,  
and the “Quebec Talmud”: A response to the anti-  
Jewish attack in a “pious” Quebec newspaper<sup>1</sup>**

*The eminent writer of this article is the new rabbi of the Adath Jeshurun–Hadrath Kodesh synagogue, who is regarded as one of the greatest Talmudists. His phenomenal memory is exceptional. Whatever saying of the Talmud you ask him about, he will tell you precisely in which tractate, in which chapter, and in which folio it is found. His current article occupies itself with the attack by a Quebec priest and his ostensible citations from the Talmud, which were printed in the "pious" Quebec newspaper l'Action Catholique. Everyone who wants to know the truth about the relationship of the Talmud to the gentiles must read this important article by a true expert in Talmudic literature.*

–The Editors [of *The Keneder Adler*]

In the *Keneder Adler* of Friday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, I read one of a series of articles written by the prominent historian, B.G. Sack, about an attack on the Jews at the hands of a priest from Quebec. Mr. Sack explains the contents of a series of articles that were published in the Quebec newspaper *l'Action Catholique*, written by the Rev. Père Bonaventure Péloquin. The priest dwells particularly on the Jewish Talmud and brings an entire array of so-called citations, which ostensibly show the corrupt nature of Jewish law in relation to Christians.

I declare here, in front of every nation and community, that some of his broken citations are entirely absent in the Talmud, while others are so distorted through translation that they have an entirely different sense than in the original.

We have [long] put up with defamatory attacks on the part of ostensible "experts" on the Talmud. In every generation, it is our luck that we have to proclaim and say: "*God has made the one opposite the other*"<sup>2</sup>... Every time assaults on the Talmud show up, there appears someone in whom the conscience of the true Christian scholar is awakened and they emerge in public with information that clarifies the true light of the Talmud.

Even in the current dark Hitler era, when falsehood rules over all and everyone, exceptional heroes are not at all lacking in the Christian world who hold high the banner of truth.

Who displays resistance to Hitlerism in Germany? The German priests! And it is natural and characteristic for a pastor to preach brotherhood and decency, much as it is natural and characteristic of a religious instructor to protest against injustice and to display sympathy to the [one] against whom this injustice is committed.

At a time when the population of Europe and its Jews are covered with blood; at a time when our country is embroiled in a war with a ruthless enemy and seeks

national unity – at that time did a priest from the devout city [of] Quebec find it necessary to torment the country through preaching racial hatred.

However, as has already been said: “*God has made the one opposite the other.*” While the Quebec priest rails against the Jews, French priests protest to the Vichy authorities against the mass deportation of Jews, and similar protests also come from French Canadians.

I have been struggling with the option: To write or not to write? Should I bring citations from the Talmud which would refute the quotes which the priest from Quebec brings to show where he took them from, or should I leave him alone?

And here I see that a prominent journalist from the *Keneder Adler*, B.G. Sack, found it necessary to write about the matter, and the editor, Y.R.,<sup>3</sup> also dedicated a column [to] that subject and even expressed a grievance against the local rabbis [as to] why they don’t answer the priest with true quotes from [the] Talmud. I therefore consider it necessary to say:

Our Sages thought of the gentiles as brothers, as children who were created from one and the same God, and they preached brotherhood, respect for another’s belief, and ordinary, fair treatment [for each other].

Here we take the words from Tractate *Berakhot* 17a, “*A favourite saying of Abbaye was: ‘One should always be subtle in the fear of heaven. A soft answer turns away wrath, and one should always strive to be on the best terms with his brethren, with his relatives, with gentiles, and with everybody.’*”

And one line later, the Talmud tells us that nobody, [whether] Jew or non-Jew, ever greeted Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, because Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai (who, according to some opinions, was a Prince in Israel) made the first move and greeted others first.

With regard to Rabbi Johanan, it is told in *Kiddushin* 33a that he used to stand up for the Aramean elders: “*Rabbi Johanan used to rise before gentile<sup>4</sup> elders.*”

In Tractate *Sukkah* 55b, it is told that in the Holy Temple they used to sacrifice 70 oxen “*equivalent to the 70 nations,*” for the well-being of the 70 nations of the world.

Jewish Tannaim and Amoraim had non-Jewish friends and associates, so for example, the Tanna Rab had a Christian friend [named] Adrakan, and when Adrakan died, the Tanna Rab gave him a eulogy with the following words: “*The bundle is separated!*” And as Rashi defined it, “*the bundle is separated: Our love that was bound from one soul to another.*” It was distinguished [by] our love which bound one soul to the other (*Avodah Zarah* 10b).

Our Sages showed respect for Torah and for its instructors and they did not distinguish between a non-Jewish and a Jewish Torah expert. The fact that Jewish sages studied together with non-Jews and quite frequently showed recognition of non-Jewish sages is a sufficient demonstration of my assertion. In the Talmud, we often encounter observations like this: "*And the statement [of the sages of the nations of the world] appears [to be more accurate] than our statement.*" [That is to say:] "Their assertions (regarding astronomy) are more coherent than ours" (*Pesahim* 94b).

The Jewish Sages were wont to acknowledge the scientific truth, which came from non-Jewish learning – and not as the priest asserts, that according to the Talmud, "each Jew considers the Christians animals and they treat them as if they were animals without intellect."

[The] Jewish Sages used to cite gentile learning: the Roman emperor Antoninus debated with the Jewish Tanna Rabbi [Judah the Patriarch] in science, and when Rabbi taught his students, he quoted Antoninus: "*Antoninus taught me this matter*" (*Sanhedrin* 91b).

Jews showed respect for non-Jewish people's learning just as they did with Jewish [learning]. In Tractate *Berakhot* 58a, we learn that [when] one sees a sage from the nations of the world, one has to make a blessing over him: "*One who sees the sages of the nations of the world says: 'Blessed be He who has given of His glory to His creatures [(li-vriyotav)]'*" I emphasize [the word] *li-vriyotav* meaning "to His creatures"; wisdom is thought of by Jews as an expression of G-d's glory, and the Sages thanked G-d's beloved name for allocating a part of that glory to His creatures, without differentiation of religion and ethnicity.

Jewish scholars, the very scholars who the Quebec priest accuses as criminals who preach ritual murder – those very "murderers" had a sense and a concept of spiritual and also of physical beauty. This is what we learn in Tractate *Avodah Zarah* 20a, that when one meets a beautiful person – and the Talmudic passage clearly emphasizes "a beautiful person from the nations of the world" – one is required to make a blessing: "*Blessed be He who has created such in His world,*" and the Tanna [Rabbi Akiva] in *Ethics of the Fathers* 3:18 expresses recognition and respect for people who are created in the image of God: "*Beloved is man[, for he] was created in [God's] image.*"

All of this applies to the physical side of people, and with regard to the spiritual, we have already shown previously that the Jewish Sages valued anyone engaged in Torah [study], and not only the Jews who are engaged in Torah [study]; as well: "*Even a gentile who engages in Torah [study] is [considered] like a High Priest!*" (*Sanhedrin* 59a). A gentile who studies Torah is comparable to a Jewish High Priest.

In *Tanna Devei Eliyahu*,<sup>5</sup> Chapter 9, it is said: “I cause heaven and earth to testify that, whether one is a Jew or a gentile, everything is according to [his] action [and] the Holy Spirit rests on them.” Whether a Jew or a non-Jew, if he does good deeds, the Holy Spirit rests on him.

The Talmud tells us about “*the pious of the nations of the world*” and the “*righteous of the nations of the world*”: “[These are the] thirty righteous men among the nations of the world by whose virtue the nations of the world continue to exist” (*Hullin* 92a), and “*the pious of the nations of the world have a portion in the World to Come*” (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 3:5).

Says the priest from Quebec: “Each Jew must curse the Christians three times a day; he must pray to G-d that he should finish and destroy them together with his kings and with his princes and that he should curse Jesus.”

Thus asserts the “Quebec Talmud.” But what does the real Talmud say? The real Talmud says in *Ethics of the Fathers*<sup>6</sup>: “Pray for the welfare of the government.” Moreover, the Talmud says something [else]: that not only is one not allowed to kill a king from the nations of the world, but exactly the opposite: it is very much a commandment for [the Jew] to welcome him and to make a blessing over him: “*Blessed be the one who took from His glory to flesh and blood!*”

Jewish law says that a priest [(*kohen*)] is forbidden to pass through a cemetery. However, in the case of welcoming a non-Jewish king, the priest may go through it – the cemetery – for the sake of honouring royalty (*Berakhot* 19b). Jews have always shown respect to all faiths.

The Jewish Sages did not recognize the “*minim*” [or “heretics”]. These “heretics” are the ones we mention every day in the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, because the “heretics” were those who were the enemies of Jews and presented false denunciations of Jews, like “*the slanderers*.”<sup>8</sup> “Heretics” does not in any way have Christians in mind.

A sensible law was enacted both for Jews and for non-Jews who have recognized the seven humanitarian commandments<sup>9</sup> (see *Shita Mekuwetzet, Bava Kamma* 39). Thus we learn in *Tanna Devei Eliyahu*, 15: “One who robbed a non-Jew is as if he robs your brother,” such that when one robs a non-Jew, it is as big a transgression as if he robs a Jew.

In *Tosefta, Bava Kamma*, Chapter 10, it is said: “Robbing a non-Jew is more severe than robbing a Jew: whoever robs the non-Jew and swears falsely – he cannot have atonement.” [That is to say,] robbing a non-Jew is more of a crime than robbing a Jew.

Our Sages of blessed memory teach us that we should support the non-Jewish poor in the same way as the Jewish [poor] and that we should show mercy to the non-

Jewish sick precisely like the Jewish [sick]: "*One sustains poor gentiles [along] with poor Jews, and one visits sick gentiles [along] with sick Jews*" (Gittin 61a).

Moreover, here is another example of the "terrible" Talmud: In *Midrash Rabbah, Beshallah*,<sup>10</sup> 23, it is told that when the Israelites were [going] across the sea at the time that their oppressors and pursuers, the Egyptians, were sunk in the depths of the sea, *the ministering angels requested to sing a song* – the angels in heaven wanted to initiate a love song to the Holy One blessed [be He]; said the Holy One blessed be He to them: *My creations are drowning in the sea and you are singing a song?* – the works of my hands are drowning in the sea and you really want to sing a praise?

Now let's see what precisely is the ethical essence of this Talmudic *Aggadah*?<sup>11</sup> Its ethical essence lies on the surface: one is not only forbidden to rejoice at the fall of friendly non-Jewish nations, but also, even when hostile nations and oppressors drown in the sea, one is forbidden to rejoice. Can the Quebec "Talmudist" show us a higher morality than what is embodied in this Talmudic *Aggadah*? I am thus very grateful to him!

And in [a] Mishnah [in] *Ethics of the Fathers* [4:24], we learn: "*When your enemy falls, do not rejoice*" – because we do not want the downfall of the enemy, only the downfall of the hatred. Thus, the Sages of blessed memory also teach us in *Berakhot* 10a: "*is it written, [let] sinners [cease]? [Let] sins [cease], is written.*" We do not request that sinners should be finished, rather that the sin should be finished.

Here is a speech from one of the greatest Jewish religious authorities which is in contradiction to that which the Quebec priest presented. Rabbi Moses Rivkes said: "*Whoever takes advantage of a [financial] blunder of a gentile is made poor.*" That is, whoever takes advantage of the mistake which a gentile made in monetary matters, and does not return it to him, becomes a poor man (*Be'er Ha-Golah, Hoshen Mishpat*, 348).

It is true that sometimes, in rare cases, we find in the Talmud sharp words aimed at the non-Jewish world. However, one ought to understand that the Talmud is a collation of words from thousands of Jewish Sages in various eras, and there were certain times when the Jewish people was terribly oppressed. And it is simply human to expect that some Jewish Sages, in the midst of their tremendous suffering on account of troubles facing the Jews, stated their opinions with sharp words. Regarding the terrible persecutions of the Jews, I just want to bring here several passages from the Talmud:

At the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, the Roman authorities issued the order: "*Anyone who does not kill [a Jew] should [himself] be killed*" (Gittin 55b)!

In *Lamentations Rabbah*, it is told: “A Jew passed before Hadrian and greeted him, and he said, ‘A Jew greets Hadrian!’ And [Hadrian] proceeded to kill him. At that time, a Jew who saw that did not greet him, and [Hadrian] said: ‘A Jew goes before Hadrian and doesn’t greet him?!’ And he also killed him.”

This means: “A Jew passed in front of Hadrian the Roman king, he greeted him, and Hadrian said: ‘A Jew greets Hadrian!’ And he delivered him to the execution. And a Jew that witnessed this did not greet Hadrian, and Hadrian said: ‘A Jew passed in front of Hadrian and did not greet him!’ And [he] also executed that Jew.”

The Sages of blessed memory sometimes expressed themselves concerning those similar to Hadrian in a sharp manner.

In general, our Sages of blessed memory did not spare any criticism when wrongs were committed and their criticism was justified; the Sages of blessed memory and also our Prophets made the same sharp criticism on us Jews, [and] they did not treat [the Jews] gently.

And we Jews must not reproach the wrongs that the Romans once committed against us as a sin for future generations. And the *Rama*,<sup>12</sup> Part 156, and the *Tiferet Yisrael* (*Bava Kamma*, Chapter 4) say as follows: “the Christians are our brothers with whom we need to make an effort to live in peace and tranquility, as children who were created from one and the same God.”

We could have taken all the quotations from the Quebec priest concerning [the] Talmud and drown them in a sea of quotations taken from [the] Talmud, quotations that demonstrate precisely the opposite of his accusations; however, because of a lack of space, it is not possible to do [it] and therefore I wish to be content with the material presented until now. I hope that the priest gets acquainted with the correct opinions from [the] Talmud and other Jewish religious books about relations among peoples [and that he] will revoke his accusations which can cause hatred against the Jewish people, who have rendered so many services to culture and civilization. *Have we not all one Father!*<sup>13</sup>...

Translated by Yosef D. Robinson.

*Translator’s Note:* The texts in Hebrew and/or Aramaic are italicized, and several of the translations for those texts are derived from the Soncino Talmud, Sefaria.org, the Artscroll prayer book or Tanakh, and the Koren prayer book.

**1**

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**2**

Ecclesiastes 7:14

**3**

Israel Rabinovitch

**4**

literally, Aramean

**5**

a Midrash

**6**

*Ethics of the Fathers* 3:2

**7**

literally, Eighteen (Benedictions)

**8**

literally, "*and for the slanderers*"; a blessing within the *Shmoneh Esrei*

**9**

the seven Noahide Commandments

**10**

*Exodus Rabbah*, portion *Beshallah*

**11**

Talmudic legend

**12**

Rabbi Moses Isserlis

**13**

Malachi 2:10