In Memoriam Father Bernard Dupuy, OP (1925-2014)

31.10.2014 | Murray Watson*

ICCJ's French member organization, the Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France (ACJF), has lost of its honourees. Father Bernard Dupuy, who died on October 3, 2014, had, together with Chief Rabbi René Samuel Sirat, received the ACJF's Prize in 1998, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Amitié judéo-chrétienne de France.

> AJCF Director Bruno Charmet, who knew Father Dupuy well, was invited to speak about Father Dupuy's work in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue during his funeral, which took place on October 6, 2014, in the St. Jacques monastery in Paris.

(The following is the text of Bruno Charmet's tribute to Father Dupuy:)

Father Dupuy was always a man of faithfulness, and especially so within the Amitié judéo-chrétienne de France. He joined our association at the start of the 70s, shortly after the Second Vatican Council, and he was very conscientious about always responding to whatever we asked of him. He considered it an urgent task for Christians to always keep front and centre the enduring vocation of the Jewish people, and of Judaism, within God's plan. And, he would add, our brotherhood must always cling to the hopes we share.

How many were the national councils, general assemblies and other groups that he spoke to, or gave interviews to!

He was available to answer any type of questions, and had an extraordinary ability to address issues of Jewish exegesis, as well as issues in Christian history related to the original split between Judaism and Christianity, or questions of a more philosophical nature, by placing them within their proper biblical perspective.

In that work, he always managed to find partners. I think first of Colette Kessler, a leading figure in Liberal Judaism, and Vice-President of the Amitié judéo-chrétienne de France for 25 years who, alas, has also died, but with whom, for many decades, he did presentations in which both of them spoke. Those presentations were marked by a deep understanding of both the Jewish and Christian traditions as they had experienced them, traditions which they constantly challenged, each of them revisiting the other's tradition, and offering their own reading of it.

But I also know that Emmanuel Lévinas (who at one point was also a member of our Association's Board) was a close friend whom he often consulted. And I know that for many years, Bernard Dupuy followed, each Sabbath, Lévinas's commentaries on the parasha, guided by Rashi. In return, Lévinas often asked him questions about specific points of Christian theology.

Copyright JCRelations

Among his other countless meetings with Jewish interlocutors, there was one in particular that at the time (at the end of the 80s) had a major impact. It was the sessions which, for an entire year, brought Father Dupuy and Rabbi Josy Eisenberg together on Antenne 2, offering together their comments on a part of the Book of Numbers, drawing upon their own traditions—the rabbinic approach (with its midrashim) and the Christian approach (with Origen and St. Jerome).

Jacques Madaule, Pierre Pierrard, Claire Huchet-Bishop, Paul Thibaud—successively presidents of the AJCF—were Father Dupuis's partners in that dialogue.

He also had other conversation-partners in other facets of Jewish-Christian dialogue: Sister Dominique de la Maisonneuve, NDS and Sister Louise-Marie Niesz, NDS, from SIDIC, who are with us this morning, or the DAVAR Association, with Claudine Maison.

Within his own religious order, how could we not mention Father Nicolas-Jean Sed, OP, and his magnificent collection, « Patrimoines du Judaïsme», which has brought honour to Éditions du Cerf.

On an institutional level, let us remember that it was Father Dupuy who, in 1969, together with Bishop Elchinger, the bishop of Strasbourg, created, the Episcopal Committee for Relations with Judaism. At Easter of 1973, they published "Pastoral Orientations," which provoked such a salutary shock, within the Catholic Church itself as much as in the Jewish world!

Beginning with the principle that "Jewish existence raises questions for the Christian conscience," that term affirms "the enduring vocation of the Jewish people"—a specific vocation of "sanctifying the Name [of God]". That declaration addresses, positively and courageously, a dimension about which the Catholic Church still had not made any pronouncements at that time (it would not be until December of 1993 that the Holy See would recognize the State of Israel), that of the "movement of the Jewish people's return to 'their' land", calling upon Christians not "to forget the gift, once made by God to the Jewish people, of a land upon which they were called to gather (Gen 12:7 ; 26:3-4 ; 28:13 ; Isa 43: 5-7 ; Jer 16:15 ; Zeph 3:20)". The document does not in any way gloss over the fact that, "because of this return and its consequences, justice has been put to the test" but it reminds Christians that they "must take into account the interpretation given by Jews to their ingathering around Jerusalem, which, according to their faith, is considered a blessing". It is important to underscore the prophetic significance of such a Christian message, which does not ignore the fact that "today, more than ever, it is difficult to pronounce a well-considered theological opinion on the return of the Jewish people to 'its' land".

Of course, Father Dupuy worked closely with his two successors on the Episcopal Commission: Father Dujardin, who is ill and therefore unable to be with us today, and Father Dubois, who is present here with us.

What we see in Father Dupuy is a person committed to journeying alongside the Jewish people. We could mention his fight to free the refuzniks in the USSR in the 70s, but also, and especially, the powerful steps he took to accompany his Jewish brothers and sisters in facing the Shoah, where words fail. We could quote several of his wonderful studies on Paul Celan, Emil Fackenheim or Adorno, and how they came face-to-face with the Shoah.

Along with his faithful collaborator, Sister Marguerite Delmotte, he also translated one of Emil Fackenheim's ground-breaking books, La présence de Dieu dans l'histoire. Affirmations juives et réflexions philosophiques après Auschwitz [The Presence of God in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections After Auschwitz), as well as books by Gershom Sholem.

For all these reasons, and many others, we conferred on him—together with Chief Rabbi Sirat—the Amitié judéo-chrétienne de France's Prize in 1998, during the fiftieth anniversary of our association.

Copyright JCRelations

Lastly, I would like to mention a more recent development, from 2008, which involved bringing together, in one large volume, a small portion of his writings: Quarante ans d'études sur Israël [Forty Years of Studies on Israel]. It was Cardinal Lustiger who wanted that first collection of studies [to be published]. I know how much his successor, Father Michel Mallèvre, OP, wanted a sequel to that work, and it is with these words that I will conclude this tribute: it will be a very long time yet before we will come to the end of listening to, studying and sharing Father Dupuy's testimony regarding our elder brothers and sisters in faith.

Bruno Charmet, AJCF

(Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France)

* Translated by Murray Watson, ICCJ Communications Officer