



Passelecq, Georges

| Belleflamme, Marc-Henri; Hirschberg, David and others

In Memoriam

Georges Passelecq

A year after his death on 27 February 1999 in Maredsous, those involved in Christian-Jewish relations are not yet accustomed to his loss. Several biographical articles have appeared and many friends were present at his funeral. We still occasionally come across people who are unaware of this and it therefore seemed useful to recall his memory on the Web.

Since the nineteen thirties he worked in many ways for the improvement of these relations: in the underground and in the camps, towards a better translation of the Bible into French so that Christians should be better acquainted with it, by an honest evaluation of the past. He was involved in numerous committees, commissions, colloquia and meetings. A man of reflection at the service of action, he felt the urgency of the work to be done. A man of few words, he spoke clearly and tried to act efficiently.

Here are extracts of two of the orations at his funeral.

Marc-Henri Belleflamme and David Hirschberg, Brussels

...[Father Georges] knew misfortune and imprisonment for nearly four years in twenty different places until his liberation by the U.S. Army at Dachau on 29 April 1945. (...) If Father Georges was imprisoned, it was because he was a member of the underground. After being arrested for the first time in March 1941, he was freed a month later. However, in October 1941 he was again arrested and this time deported. After his liberation he was sent to Germany on several information-gathering missions.

When he returned to the Abbey, he started translating the Bible into French because of the shocking ignorance of the Bible, which he had seen in many Catholics. The New Testament appeared in 1949, while the first edition of the full Bible dates from 1 February 1950. He was the sole translator except for one or two books. (...) He wanted to make books published elsewhere accessible to a French-speaking public so he translated them. His translations include Abraham Heschel's *Passion for Truth*.

My remarks would have serious omissions if I did not mention what I think was most dear to him: coming together with our Jewish brothers and sisters, the knowledge of Israel, the continuous dialogue with those who were the first to receive the Revelation.

Even before the war, his father was active in welcoming those who fled the Hitler regime. From Maredsous, where he was at the time, Father Georges made contact with the Jewish community. He kept up these contacts, which were little known but nonetheless, fruitful. It was a beginning. In 1969 the Belgian [Catholic] bishops founded a national Catholic commission for relations between Jews and Christians of which Father Georges became the secretary. It was as if a searchlight had

been switched on suddenly showing all that had previously been taking place in the shadows. (...)

The friendships, which Father Georges acquired, are a sufficient measure of what he contributed to them. This is why the Central Jewish Consistory of Belgium presented him with its medal. Dare I say that although Father Georges received many other medals and decorations for services rendered, this was the only one in which he showed his pride publicly.

He continued his contacts with Jews and the fight against all forms of racism and antisemitism until shortly before his death. We recall the book he wrote with Bernard Suhecky on Pius XI's projected encyclical. He left on the table of our scriptorium documents he was using in writing a book on what Jules Isaac called "teaching mistrust" the day he asked Pope John XXIII to correct what was infamous. (...)

P.Nicolas DAYEZ
Abbot of Maredsous

Belgian Judaism, which I represent here today, mourns the loss of a Just of the Nations. We all regret the passing of him who during many decades was the key worker for the improvement of relations between Christians and Jews. Others have spoken about his career, which spanned most of the twentieth century. (...)

We know that, like many Catholics in Belgium, he was active in the Resistance in saving Jewish children. Like the Jews, he knew the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, whence he returned more concerned than ever in his fight for the respect of human rights and against racism and all forms of discrimination. Georges Passelecq was the secretary of the Catholic commission for relations with Judaism since its creation by the Belgian [Catholic] Bishops' Conference in 1969. As vice president he remained very active until his last weeks in spite of his illness and his physical handicap. Need I recall his intervention concerning the attempt by Carmelites to install a convent at Auschwitz, his reaction to the publication of the Bible of the so-called "Communautés chrétiennes" which repeated the anti-Jewish accusations current before Pope John XXIII's encyclical, his concern at the ever increasing number of beatifications and canonisations of people whose behaviour cast a shadow on the development of the dialogue between Jews and Christians which is so fundamental, so essential. Not only was Passelecq the representative of the [Catholic] Church towards the Jewish community but he also played an inestimable part in receiving information from the Consistory, which he passed to the Church.

Georges Passelecq showed that it is possible to live one's faith without denigrating that of others. He was close not only to Jews but also to those of other faiths; to agnostics and to atheists. Spearhead of dialogue since Vatican II, he leaves a great void. He was tolerant but also a man of great moral rectitude.

Passelecq knew and loved both Jews and Judaism. According to Jewish tradition what God wants from humans is that they be happy both on earth and in heaven. The Jewish view is not that the world was created to be a valley of tears, but a happy and pleasant dwelling. The Bible tells us that it is by His goodness that God wanted the universe and all in it. (...)

Georges Passelecq, we shall never forget you. Your personality has made its mark on the generations of the twentieth century.

You will be constantly in our minds as, Jews and Christians together, we continue this dialogue beyond the next millennium and encourage the peace and security so desired and so necessary.

Prof. Georges Schnek
President of the Central Jewish Consistory of Belgium

