**Lightning Apologetics**

We are going to take a little break here (since we had four parts on the Inquisition) to tell you the story of Israel Zolli. It’s an inspiring story and this little biography is an apologetic in itself, so we are really not departing from apologetics. The story is by Fr. Arthur Klyber, who is a convert from Judaism and became a Redemptorist priest in 1932. Fr. Klyber, who directed a group called “Remnant of Israel,” is now deceased but his writings live on.

**The Chief Rabbi’s Conversion**

On February 17, 1945, Israel Zolli, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, and his wife were baptized in the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels by Msgr. Luigi Tralia. Zolli was the Chief Rabbi of Trieste for 35 years before coming to Rome. His deep learning in the Scriptures and Semitic literature may be seen in the many books he published. Catholic scholars publicly recognized these learning years before his conversion, when they invited him to assist in the work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and in the compiling of the Italian Catholic Encyclopedia. The former Rabbi is now deceased. He was a vigorous man. He was born in Poland. His mother was a German Jewess; and, on her side of the family there were actually 130 years of rabbinical tradition.

It is no surprise to find newspaper comments on Zolli’s action insolent, at least by implication. For instance, it was neither necessary, nor good sportsmanship, for certain newspapers to headline the story: “Voices, Rays Convert Rabbi to Catholicism.” Moreover, it was disrespectful and offensive to millions to call the conversion a “religious switch,” since it was the outcome of at least 12 years of serious thinking and study by a serious-minded ecclesiastic of the Synagogue.

Only in the Associated Press dispatch by George Bria do we find any reference to the “voices and rays” supposed to have affected the Rabbi. Nevertheless, even if Zolli did use such expressions, they did not mean what the casual reader of the news was led to think, namely, that the convert was a dreamer or crackpot; and that this conversion was to be passed off with a pitying shake of the head. If Zolli did use that phrase, he was referring to the interior inspiration he had received from the Light of the World. As Chief Rabbi of Rome, this sincere man had offered himself as hostage to the Nazi forces then occupying the city, if they would release several hundreds of his fellow Jews. Was that the conduct of a dreamer? Wasn’t it rather the action of a practical-minded, self-sacrificing pastor?

Jews, and especially the rabbis of the Orthodox group, do not become Christians light-mindedly, nor without powerful help from God. Experience has proved that a prospective convert from Judaism may nearly always look forward to severe boycotts from his family and friends and all former Jewish associates. If Orthodox, he may expect even father and mother to turn bitterly against him. They will put him out of their home and blot out his name from their will. All his Jewish business connections will be snapped, even if they mean his bread and butter. If the convert is a member of some milder branch of Judaism, such as the Conservative or Liberal, his penalty for conversion will be bad enough. Israel Zolli and his wife had to face most of those evils. In reply to a suggestion that he had become Catholic for gain, the courageous Rabbi said, “No selfish motive led me to do this. When my wife and I embraced the Church, we lost everything we had in the world. We shall now have to look for work, and God will help us to find some.”

Therefore, when a Jew is willing to take such a cross as this as the price of his conversion, he makes his momentous break with the past only from rock-like conviction that he is doing what God wishes him to do, and only by the power of God. This is clear in Zolli’s case, from his defense of his decision.

***cont’d next week.***