

H. L. Rossier

**Comments on
the book of Esther**

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Introduction

The events which the book of Esther narrate to us, take place between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra, that is to say, between the reign of Darius (the son of Hystaspis) and the reign of Artaxerxes (surnamed "Longimanus"). The gap which separates these two reigns is filled by the reign of Ahasuerus (otherwise known as Xerxes. 485-465 B.C.), the son of Darius and the father of Artaxerxes. Thus, the events recorded in this inspired account take place under Ahasuerus (Xerxes).

Every school boy knows about the power and wealth of Xerxes, the role he played in his struggle against Greece during the Median wars, and how, in the sixth year of his reign, after he was defeated at Salamis by the fleet of his adversaries, he fled and returned to his own land. But it is useful to remind ourselves that, in order to understand the Word, even this elementary information is not necessary. One passage in Daniel (Dan. 10:20 - 11:2) is enough to familiarize us with all we need to know on the subject. On the contrary, it is important to remember at this point, that the events which fill the history of

the world with their commotion, scarcely count for anything in the inspired book. God does not mention them except when they intervene in one way or another in the history of His people, or when they prefigure prophetic events, or disputes between peoples, of which Israel will be the object. (Dan. 11) It is even the case that the Word does not record the powerful collisions of nations except for one purpose: to have us witness the deliverance of just one individual among those whom He loves. (Gen. 14) This truth has a great importance for us. The conflicts among nations in our own day often preoccupy us to such a high degree, that our souls lose communion with the Lord. Let us take the Word in order to measure the value of these conflicts and let us weigh the facts in the scales of the sanctuary; how small they will seem to us in the light of our God's eternal counsels! The greatest overturnings of the greatest empires which seem to shake the world on its foundations, weigh no more than a speck in God's scales, unless His people are in question, whether it be a matter of judgment upon themselves, or of vengeance against their adversaries. (Deut. 32:8) We see an example of this in the New Testament: the tre-

mendous task of taking the census of the entire inhabited earth, by the greatest of the Caesars, had no other result than to bring about the birth of a little Child at Bethlehem: and at the time of the end, the gigantic struggles of the greatest captains and their innumerable armies, disappear like vapor at the appearance of a single Man. In the Old Testament, the overthrowing of the world by the Assyrian and all his victories, have no importance except as God's rod against unfaithful Israel. Likewise, the victory of Babylon over Assyria has no importance except in so far as it accomplishes the same designs of God in regard to Judah.

The book of Esther confirms the principle we have just presented. The Median wars which shook, for so many years, the world of that time, are quite simply passed over in silence. In this book it is no more a question, of the victory of Greece (Javan), than it is of the defeat of the Persians. Such far distant events prepared the ground for the ruin of Persia, the second universal empire (which did not administrate what God entrusted to its care any better than Babylon, the first empire, had done), but they do not concern the people of God.

There is one very unique feature of the book of Esther which escapes no one's notice. The name of God is absent in it. The reason for this omission is incomprehensible for the Jews, for a partial hardening has come upon them, and they do not understand the mind of God in their own Scriptures. We shall see that this suppression is the absolute condemnation of this people, and this is precisely what they do not want to acknowledge. Even though the book of Esther has still today a capital importance among the holy books, for the Jews, and although it is still solemnly read at the feast of Purim, the sentiments of the listeners during this reading are revealed by curses against Haman, his wife and his sons, but have in no way the character of self-judgment. So little do they understand the omission of the name of God, that the Greek version of the Septuagint, made by Alexandrian Jews, seems to have had in the past the purpose of remedying what they considered to be an oversight, through numerous apocryphal additions, where the name of God is very often mentioned.

In order to explain this singular omission, let us first look at the circumstances in which the Jews found themselves in the book of Esther.

At the time of the decree issued by Cyrus, which came at the end of 60 years of captivity, a considerable number of Jews, who saw in this decree the fulfillment of the word of God, returned to the land, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Ezra lead others back at a later time. This emigration included 42,360 persons. No doubt, more than once, individuals returned to Jerusalem from Babylon or other areas of the empire, in order to worship, or to bring gifts (see, for example, Zechariah 6:9-10). But, in a general way, whether out of indifference for Jerusalem and the temple, or whether out of love for comfort, self-interest, or any other reason, a great part of Judah and Benjamin remained in the Persian provinces where they had established themselves. The emigrants answered to the mind of God by returning to Jerusalem, but the others did not seem to appreciate the humiliation of their servile condition, and remained there where they were. It goes without saying that we exempt from this category of personalities those like Daniel, Ezra, Ne-

hemiah, and Mordecai, whose official functions retained them under direct dependence on the Persian monarchy.

Those who returned, without being acknowledged by God as a nation (for the sentence which had declared them to be Lo-Ammi* had not been recalled) had relations with the Lord individually and even collectively, despite the complete absence of national relations with Him. And it pleased Him to support them, bringing them into the understanding of His thoughts through their leaders, teachers and prophets, so as to maintain their faith and encourage them. God's purpose was to prepare them to receive the Messiah, and, if they would receive Him, to re-establish them as a nation and once again call them my people. We know how all these plans of grace toward Israel were interrupted by the rejection of Christ. We know how, after this rejection, the Church was formed by the Holy Spirit and how finally the restoration of Israel was postponed to a time yet future, as described by the prophets. Despite everything, the beginnings of the restoration of Judah and Benjamin were particularly blessed, as Ezra, Nehemiah, and the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi testify.

* Meaning "not my people".

The condition of the people who had preferred to remain in the land of their captivity, was, on the contrary, most unfortunate. Although they enjoyed an outward prosperity, they were not only Lo-Ammi, like their brothers restored to the land of Palestine, but they were deprived of any communication whatsoever between themselves and God. God was hidden from them; He had turned His face away from them. A heavy veil of sorrow and abandon weighed upon this people. They had neither the energy of faith (since that energy had not manifested itself at the time of the decree issued by Cyrus), nor even the enjoyment of individual relationships with God. Israel's sun had set. There was no longer even a lamp to guide their feet in the night which had enveloped them. Whereas other had gone up toward the light, or rather had drawn near the light by returning to Jerusalem, these people had remained seated in the darkness of the shadow of death. Not a single ray of light from the face of God came to pierce through the darkness at this moment. This explains why, religiously, in the book of Esther, everything is plunged into a mysterious shadow. Daily life con-

tinues, but the spring of this life is weakened, and more than that: it is destroyed.

But what else do we see in this people?

The Scriptures, which played such an important role in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, are completely absent. Neither were there any of the feasts, instituted by the law of Moses (whose celebration was habitual among the remnant returned to Jerusalem) - there were none of these feasts, we repeat, except the feast of Purim (an entirely new solemnity instituted when the people in Babylon had been delivered.) The sacrifices, the priesthood, the service of God: everything had disappeared, or at least, had completely ceased to be mentioned, for we know that a large number of priests and Levites had not returned to Jerusalem, either at the time of the decree of Cyrus or on other occasions. If communication from God to the people was completely lacking, communication from the people to God was just as absent.

Prayer is not mentioned even once. In their deepest moment of distress, they wear sack cloth and sprinkle ashes upon their

heads, and fasting is ordained, but there is never a word of prayer or supplication. I am not saying, note carefully, that these things could not have taken place among believers, but they are never reported. All we see in these believers is solicitude for the nation and, as the final blow approaches, distress and supreme anguish, with a feeble thought, prompted by faith, that help might come "from another place." (Esther 4:14)

Thus their position may be summarized as follows: Heaven was closed to them, there was no national or individual relationship with God, quite different in this respect from the people under Ezra or Nehemiah. They are abandoned, left in servitude, bowed down under the heavy yoke of the nations, outwardly without God and with nothing else but a weak hope. They come, they go, they live, and they trade, despised and hated by most of the population, keeping a low profile in order to escape hostile attention, unhappy, but accustomed to the yoke they bear, and remembering, in the midst of their abjection, their past greatness, for they were not sustained, as those who returned to Jerusalem, by their affection for the altar, the temple, and the walls of Jerusalem, no doubt having among

them part of the priestly race, as we see in the book of Ezra, but without an object for which to exercise it. Their woe is not even assuaged by outward expression, except when their terrible portion is decreed. If I had one expression to describe this condition, I would call it the indifference of the unfortunate. Just look at them: they had no country, no capital, no city but Shushan, the capital of the Gentiles, no prince, no priest with the ephod, neither the Urim nor the Thummim, through which they might have consulted the Lord (the remnant in Palestine had at least the hope of this, Ezra 2:63), but they also had neither idols nor theraphim. (Hosea 3:4) They live in a moral desert. I am speaking of the impression which this book intends to produce, for the second book of the Psalms, which places us prophetically in the midst of the same circumstances, shows us that their faith addresses God, rather than Jehovah.

This complete absence of relationship with God, draws down on this remnant of the captivity the disdain of the world to which they are in servitude. The characteristic expression of the second book of Psalms, where we see the remnant of Judah driven from Jerusalem and dwelling in the midst of the nations

— this expression: "Where is thy God?" — applies in a special way to the circumstances of the book of Esther. "They say unto me all the day, Where is thy God?" "As with a crushing in my bones mine adversaries reproach me, while they say unto me all the day, Where is thy God?" says the dejected soul of the remnant who "go... mourning because of the oppression of the enemy." (Ps. 42) And likewise, in the prophet Joel: "Spare, O Jehovah, thy people, and give not thine inheritance to reproach, that they should be a by-word of the nations. Wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is thy God?" (Joel 2:17) But even this abandon, this void produced around them, added to the danger of death which threatens them from one moment to the next, causes them to cry out to the very God who hides His face from them: "Many say, Who shall cause us to see good? Lift up upon us the light of thy countenance, O Jehovah!"* (Ps. 46)

- * This fact alone already indicates to us (and we will return to this) that the book of Esther is a typical book. We will become increasingly convinced of this as we study the character of the personalities depicted in it; Ahasuerus, Vashti, Esther, Haman, and Mordecai. This is all the more remarkable since the books

of Ezra and Nehemiah, although they are full of instruction for the present time and for all periods of time, do not have this typical character. This is also the reason why the book of Esther could not have been added to the book of Ezra, into which, from a historical point of view, it should be inserted. This is without speaking of the fact that, the book of Esther, treating the dispersion of the Jews among the nations, transports the remnant to another terrain entirely.

Thus God is hidden, and if God is hidden, everything else is hidden as well. The light of the world has disappeared; night has fallen, in which no one can work. This light may shine in the midst of the ruins of Jerusalem, in a miserly way, so to speak, but it shines there where the conscience is active, there where souls, like the soul of Ezra, confess the sin of the people, repent and humble themselves. Here we find nothing of the kind. The world may shine in all its earthly splendor, but Israel is seated in darkness. The great light, which the prophet speaks of, will not shine again until the first appearance of the little Child of Bethlehem.

In the days of Esther, the people, who have been reduced to servitude, hide themselves. Mordecai, a servant of the all-powerful king, does not reveal his race until forced to explain his attitude toward Haman. Esther, under Mordecai's orders, hides her origin and does not dare declare it, which would be her ruin. She is a little like the 7,000 men who were not known at the time of Israel's apostasy and the notorious cult of Baal. Only, in the book of Esther, the people are not hidden from a triumphant display of idolatry. The sovereigns of Persia abhorred false gods and practiced the religion of Zoroaster which completely repudiated idols: no doubt it was a false religion, but it was not grossly idolatrous, like the religion of the Chaldeans. The Zoroastrian religion acknowledged a supreme God, Ormuz, a benevolent God, with His good genies, and a second God, a malevolent God, Ahriman, who was eternal like the first, contending against Him with equal power, and always seeking, together with His evil genies, to seduce man, but whose power must come to an end, leaving the benevolent God to triumph. This Ahriman is the devil who has succeeded in "seducing men by bringing them fruit to eat," and by this

means depriving them of the advantages which they had enjoyed. In all this we see, along with gross errors concerning the nature of God, an altered echo of the primitive oral traditions — the original reality of which God has given us in His Word. Ahasuerus [has] little more than this feature — his religion — in common with Cyrus, his father Darius, and his son Artaxerxes.

In the midst of this scene, in the cold mist which shrouds the captives (and this is the main feature of the book of Esther) a hidden Providence watches over them. The entire account proves this, and we will have ample occasion to point this out when we come to details. This is because God is faithful and because, even if He is obliged to hide His face, He cannot deny Himself. He does not repent Himself of His promises, and, even when He passes over them in complete silence, He remembers them perfectly. He cannot declare this character as long as the people bear the effects of their governmental judgment, whose sentence is about to be executed. If He acts differently toward the people returned to Jerusalem, it is in view of the coming of Christ into their midst, as the last three prophets

witness. Here, in the book of Esther, there is nothing of the kind. But, in this silence, God remains the same, and God is love. He is not only the holy God; He remains what He has always been, a God whose bowels are moved with compassion toward this guilty people. This is the reason for the unceasing care of His providence.

We may consider the providence of God in two ways. In the first aspect, men have the public spectacle before their eyes every day: the indisputable manifestation of this providence, as the apostle says: "[God] did not leave himself without witness, doing good, and giving to you from heaven rain and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness." (Acts 14:17) The second aspect is of a providence which is hidden in its ways and purpose, in such a way that men can discern it only through its final result. In this way a Moses — and such examples are frequent — saved from the waters by the ways of providence, and introduced in the same way to Pharaoh's court, becomes the deliverer of his people. At every turn we find this second character of Providence in the book of Esther. Remaining hidden, it directs events, and only faith knows that it is at

work and counts on it. This is also the reason why, faith is necessary in order to understand this book. To summarize, here we find secret Providence acting in the midst of the most terrible dangers which could assail the people under the governmental wrath of God — in order to give them rest through vengeance upon their enemies and in order to introduce the reign of peace.

There is another important feature of the book of Esther, which we must insist upon. One of the most marvelous traits of the Old Testament — and here we include not only the prophetical writings, but also the law, the historical books and, in a word, all other writings — is that it either presents the moral principles which are valid at all times, and go completely beyond the periods in which they were composed, or it prefigures events yet to come and personalities of the future. The feature we speak of may be more or less evident according to the different writings, but it is a constant feature. Even when God hides Himself, as in the book of Esther, one feels that He chooses the actors and one distinguishes, behind the scene, the

One who is at work sovereignly, mysteriously shaping the type of events and personalities to come in the future.

For those who study the Word with prayer, this fact that we find types, even in a book like Esther, is, as we shall see, of great importance. When we consider this account, it gives our spirit a familiar impression. A certain event, a certain personality, carries our thoughts toward future things often meditated upon. Facts link up, persons appear or associate together in a characteristic way. A certain allusion, a certain name which would not be remarkable to a casual reader, suddenly takes on unexpected significance, and becomes clear in a burst of light. And it is not one of the least attractions of this divine book, to cause us to discover a thought which runs like a silent underground stream, unknown to the common man, who walks over the ground without suspecting its presence, until the moment when the Spirit of God allows it to spring forth — and it suddenly gushes up, like an artesian well, before the eyes of those who doubted its existence.

Such is the case with the book of Esther. There is nothing which seems to offer less for edification than this history, if we stay on the surface level of it. Because of this, many people have inserted thoughts, which are very useful on other occasions, but which this history does not contain. Others might be tempted to prefer the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are so full of edifying principles, applicable to our present circumstances, but which do not present prophetic types, because these types are contained in contemporaneous prophets: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. But, I repeat, when we tune our ears to the murmur of the underground current, what mysteries we discover!

- Divine power concentrated in one person;
- the deliverer, elevated to royalty and crowned;
- the sworn enemy of the man who represents the people, judged and condemned;
- the Gentile wife repudiated;
- the Jewish wife come out of her captivity and become the wife of the great King;

- the remnant passing through great tribulation, until the intervention of the deliverer;
- peace and joy succeeding this deliverance!

It is an astonishing thing that the opposition of men against Christ especially attacks this book, in appearance so conformed to the principles which reign in the world. This is because those who fight against it vaguely sense the existence of a secret which they do not wish to see or know and which nevertheless they hate.

Special circumstances explain why these things are presented in such a secret way and through the use of types, in appearance so incomplete; and why these types may remain undetected even by the reader who believes, but who lacks spiritual intelligence. The people, as we have already said, no longer exist; every link which connected them to God is broken: the Master of the harvest sleeps. Here, when we come on the scene of the great tribulation, "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), the character of those who go through it is very different from that which we usually meet in the Psalms and the prophets. In the book of Es-

ther we do not have the spectacle of a repenting, upright remnant, who acknowledge that they have merited their chastisement, and who cry out to God from the depths with the consciousness that they will not escape, if God should give heed to iniquities. Here, on the contrary, every link with God having been broken, the people who are no longer "beloved", see no possibility of deliverance. Only one man, Mordecai, who will be the instrument of that deliverance, knows that it will come.

Quite different than the feelings expressed in the book of Esther, are the feelings of the remnant returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Ezra. Although they are Lo-Ammi, they are conscious of their relationship with the Lord. And so, in the book of Esther, the distress depicted is greater and more poignant, even though it is properly the remnant dwelling in Jerusalem who, in prophetic times, will be put to death and undergo martyrdom. Here, we say, the distress is more anguishing, and provokes "a loud and bitter cry" (Esther 4:1), and nevertheless, in the final account, not a single hair of their heads falls in that foreign land. Their condition is that of the woman pursued by the dragon, in Revelation 12:16; whereas the situ-

ation of the remnant, remaining in Judea and Jerusalem, is indicated to us in verse 17 of this same chapter. In their case, we find active faith, a deep sense of sin, repentance, hope which is expressed in the Psalms by the words: "How long?", and expectation of the Messiah's appearance. In the case of the people in Esther, the terrible anguish of destruction which seems to be immediate and inevitable, is further aggravated by the sentiment they have, of being part of Judah and Benjamin; and, faced with their imminent ruin, they have no assurance, but nevertheless, despite everything, they have a ray of hope. "Perhaps...", "Who knows...", says Mordecai.*

* Concerning the great tribulation, consult Jeremiah 30:4-11; Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21-22.

Historically, the remnant which remained in Persia, in the book of Esther, belongs to Judah just as much as those of its members who returned to Palestine.*

* The situation will be the same in the prophetic last days. Some will remain in Jerusalem, and others will flee among the nations. (Matthew 24:15-19)

Thus the Word does not present here two remnants of Judah, but rather the remnant of Judah in two different situations: the one corresponds to the degree of faith and obedience that the people had shown in returning to their inheritance and rebuilding the temple, the other corresponds to their indifference and unfaithfulness. Only God uses the circumstances of the people who remained in Persia, in order to give, in the book of Esther, an idea of the extreme distress of Israel in the future. The helpless ship has lost its rudder, compass, masts and sails; it is thrown here and there in the night, driven toward the reefs which, in an instant, will break it up and swallow it up. There is no hope, no help! And during this time a mysterious hand prepares deliverance through an event which calms the furious waves and "[brings the ship] unto their desired haven." (Ps. 107:30) And this haven is the grace which introduces the people in peace to the joy and glory of the kingdom. Thus, the entire prophetic history of Israel is summarized, in type, in these few passages of the book of Esther: the nation is rejected and brought into servitude; the Jewish wife is a slave at first, then received in grace, and becomes the queen of the nations;

the great tribulation, during which not a hair of their heads shall fall in a foreign land; judgment overcomes their adversaries; and the reign of peace is introduced!

And so the book of Esther is the history of the future scattering of Judah among the nations and, in a sense, we may apply it to the scattering which followed the death of Christ until our own days; but this account, as we have said, goes much further than the present epoch. In type it goes on to the history of the remnant of Judah, scattered in a future day among the nations, whereas part of them will continue their testimony at Jerusalem. All will be deeply tested in their conscience, but the Word does not mention this moral work in the book of Esther, in order to concentrate our attention on the interrupted relationship between the people and God, the depth of their distress, and the greatness of the grace which effectuates their deliverance.

Chapter 1

Ahasuerus and Vashti

The account begins with the description of solemnities which have been unequaled, even until our own time, which were celebrated for a period of six months by king Ahasuerus (Xerxes) at Shushan, the capital of the Persian empire. The prophet Daniel had predicted this ostentation, saying: "Behold... the fourth (king of Persia) shall enrich himself with great riches more than all; and when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all the realm of Greece." (Dan. 11:2) "The third year of his reign" corresponds, according to history, to the year in which his formidable expedition against Greece (which had already victoriously resisted Darius, his father) was decreed. We have no doubt that all this show of luxury and power was intended to prepare this expedition by planning together with the princes, nobles and chief men of the one hundred twenty-seven provinces of this immense empire. A special term which characterizes some of them, seems to us to indicate this purpose. This passage speaks of the power (v. 3), next in

line after the princes of the kingdom. This expression, "the power," properly speaking, means the army, that is to say, the leaders or generals of the army. Except for this detail, there is not the least allusion to the purpose of this ostentatious reception. As we have said, in the introduction, these immense preparations are of no interest, in the Word, except in the measure in which they concern the people of God, or prepare — as was the case here — the fall of the empire of the nations, since the Gentiles had not answered to the purpose of God, who had entrusted them with sovereign power following the unfaithfulness of His people! How this observation minimizes all the political plans of men in the eyes of a believer! God has only to say to the sea which threatens to cover the world: Thou shalt go no further! in order for its efforts to disappear like the wind which unloosed it. And this was because in the midst of this unprecedented pomp — for, in addition to his fabulous riches, Ahasuerus reigned over 127 provinces, whereas Darius the Mede, as powerful as he was, had only 120 under his scepter (Dan. 6:1) — God was mindful of a people who were dispersed, des-

troyed, the object of the disdain and hatred of their oppressors. We shall soon see this people appear on the scene.

But first let us say a few words about Ahasuerus, and see how the Word depicts him. His natural character comes out strikingly in this book, and the likeness of the Biblical portrait can be confirmed, as if that were necessary, by what history teaches us about him. Ahasuerus presents a singular mixture of pride and weakness. His pride is sustained by the custom established at all times by great men and governors, that the law of the Medes and Persians was irrevocable. This custom gave the king the illusion of being himself a sacred person, unchanging, all the while giving the great men of the empire a means of escaping from the power of the arbitrator on the throne. This is precisely what these men of high rank had called upon under the reign of Darius the Mede, in order to rid themselves of the prophet Daniel. No request or prayer made for a period of thirty days in the empire was to be addressed to anyone but Darius, which elevated him, as a monarch, to the rank of the divine. The pride of Ahasuerus drives him to display the most hyperbolic pomp in order to dazzle the great men and the people

of his empire. Moreover, it is decreed that if someone should appear before him without being invited, that person should be put to death. No one can see the face of a god and live, unless (a fresh proof of his sovereign will) the king should stretch forth his golden scepter to him and received him in grace.

Ahasuerus' haughty awareness of his omnipotence is allied to his terribly violent character, whenever an obstacle or form of resistance appeared in his path. Time and again, in the course of this account, the king bursts into wrath and his fury blazes. (Esther 1:12; Esther 2:1; Esther 7:7, 10) Violence is never an indication of strength, but rather, on the contrary, it denotes the weakness of a man incapable of governing himself. This weakness reveals itself again in the fact that Ahasuerus, despite his pretensions of being a deified sovereign, is the plaything of his favorites and he allows them to usurp his place, at the price of turning on them in vengeance should they displease him. And let us add, that when he had to make a decision concerning queen Vashti which concerned only himself personally, he surrounds himself with counselors who persuade him that the queen's act touches the very organization of the state.

But, not only is Ahasuerus weak and violent, he is also indifferent to the wretchedness of his people. He authorizes even the most cruel acts, provided that these acts exempt him from the trouble of making an investigation, and delivers thousands of lives in his kingdom over to a wicked man, who is his favorite. In fact, this formidable man has no character in the midst of all the machinery of Omnipotence.

And nevertheless, as strange as it may seem, we find in Ahasuerus, who appropriates divine prerogatives to himself, a type of the power of God; for, in a time when God hides His face from His people, he confides sovereignty to the leaders of the nations. Thus, God uses this monarch — whose limitless ambition seeks only to make himself equal to Him, satiating his passions — in order to depict for us divine authority and power operating sovereignly, in view of showing grace to His people and of transferring administrative power to the man of his choice. Thus, it is only the Sovereign who has the right to show grace; and this truth, hidden in the shadows, brought some comfort to this afflicted, miserable people. We cannot insist enough on this. Whereas God had turned away from His

people, there remained, to the eyes of faith, a principle of authority: the right to elevate and abase, the right to show grace, personified in the leader of the nations, to whom God had confided it (after His people had proved themselves unfaithful.) Thus Ahasuerus, who in reality usurped the place of God, has, in type, divine authority and is the representative of it. He has supreme power, manifested in figure in the book in which God hides Himself, but in which it suits Him to show that His authority subsists in spite of everything. Ahasuerus is also the type of divine power in relation to Esther and on behalf of Mordecai, as we will see later.

This truth, which is a familiar one to those who are acquainted with the types of the Old Testament, leads us to other observations. In the chapter before us now, we see Vashti, the Gentile wife, give evidence of her rebellion, disobedience and lack of submission toward the one whose favor had lifted her up to the throne. She is proud of her position and prerogatives and does not fear to show her independence in relation to the head she depends upon, and she refuses to display her beauty publicly. The consequence of the revolt is that she is repudiated as his

wife, and a captive Jewish virgin is called to take a place she has never had, as the wife of this great king. According to the wise men who surround Ahasuerus, Vashti's revolt, if it were tolerated, would sanction individual independence throughout the kingdom. It is therefore necessary to restore order: The Gentile wife is entirely repudiated. And this is what will happen to the Church, taken from among the nations, seen in her character of Christian responsibility. She will be left to her fate and will be worth no more than the least prostitute for the Sovereign ruler. She will disappear and never be mentioned again.

This chapter 1 also has a lesson for us from the moral point of view. The limitless power of Ahasuerus is held in check by a weak woman who resists him. A grain of sand humiliates all the pride of this enormous empire which is so thoroughly organized. Vashti may be divorced, but her act remains and the humiliated king is powerless to force her to appear in public. If she had repented, what would the result have been? Here, from the very beginning we find the hidden providence of God at work. Man is full of grandiose projects: a feast which lasts for seven days, the crowning event of these long solemnities, leads

to Vashti's revolt against the king's decision. Her decreed and irrevocable repudiation is not carried out until Ahasuerus returns, at which time the Jewish wife, prepared by Providence, can come on the scene and be substituted, at the appropriate moment, for the Gentile wife.

Chapter 2

Esther, wife and queen.

Chapter 1 was a preamble, intended particularly to show us the repudiation of the Gentile wife, who had refused to show her beauty to the nations. Chapter 2 introduces the two principal characters of the book onto the scene, and reveals to us how Providence secretly prepares the ways which would elevate the Jewish wife publicly to the level of royalty over the nations. The first of these two characters is Mordecai.

Mordecai was the great-grandson of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who had been taken captive from Jerusalem* to Babylon, under Jehoiakim (Jeconiah). This Kish was no doubt of Saul's race, as his name indicates, for in 1 Chr. 9:36 we

already met a Kish, the uncle of Kish, Saul's father. It is true that this name is also mentioned as belonging to the members of the Levitical family**, but who were probably established in the territory of Benjamin. However that may be, the name of Kish was celebrated on account of it's connection with the royalty, formerly established by God in Israel, but rejected by Him on account of it's unfaithfulness; and it is possible for us to think that Mordecai's great-grandfather belonged to this de-throned royal race. Whereas, at the time of the decree given by Cyrus, Zerubbabel, who was the last representative of the family of David, had returned to Jerusalem with the faithful portion of the tribe of Judah, a representative of the family of Saul had remained with the ruined, rejected people, just as the unfaithful king from this family had formerly done. Mordecai himself was in servitude. He had not taken advantage of the decree of Cyrus in order to return to Jerusalem***, not out of indifference, but because, like Daniel and Nehemiah, he had a responsibility to fulfill at the king's court, and could not leave without special authorization which he was probably forbidden to request on account of the position which he occupied. He "sat in

the king's gate." (Esther 2:19, 21; Esther 6:12) We see Daniel himself occupy this place (Dan. 2:49), at the moment when he was raised up in dignity, as governor of the province of Babylon and as the chief administrator of all the wise men of Babylon. No doubt it was a subordinate position, but a position of confidence, implying, as we see in the rest of our account, particular watchfulness over the person of the sovereign ruler. Such was this man and his function. Later we shall become acquainted with his character.

- * Jerusalem was the common domain of both the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. (1 Chr. 8:28, 32)
- ** (See also Kushaiah 1 Chr. 15:17); 1 Chr. 6:44; 1 Chr. 23:21-22; 1 Chr. 24:28-29; 2 Chr. 29:12.
- *** The Mordecai of Ezra 2:2 and of Nehemiah 7:7 cannot be the same person.

Mordecai brought up his cousin Esther*, the daughter of his uncle who had been orphaned of both her father and mother, in his home as though she were his own daughter. Between these two, the adoptive father and his adoptive daughter, there was a very close and affectionate relationship. Esther was character-

ized above all else by her obedience to Mordecai's orders, whether or not she understood their bearing. He had forbidden her to declare her people or her birth: Esther obeyed, for "did what Mordecai told her, like as when she was brought up with him." (v. 20) The time had not yet come to declare her origin.

- * Esther bore the name of Hadassah, which means Myrtle. The names of the Old Testament are so often symbolical, that I do not hesitate to see in this case the earnest of the people's restoration. (See the book of Zechariah, by H. R., p. 15.)

Ahasuerus, who had returned from his expedition, (for several years had passed since the events reported in Esther 1 — see Esther 1:3, Esther 2:16), remembered what Vashti had done. Preoccupied by other cares and more urgent interests, he had left his wrath time to calm down. Now he had the leisure time to think about his family line and the civil organization of his kingdom. Following the advice of his counselors, young "maidens, virgins of beautiful countenance" were brought to Shushan out of all the countries within his empire, so that the king might chose one of them to replace Vashti. Esther, along with many others, fulfilled these conditions. Did she then have advantages

which distinguished her from all her companions? Certainly her origin would have excluded her from the beginning; and Mordecai, being aware of the humiliation of his people, knew it very well. Thus, Esther is a hidden wife, but her grace and her beauty attract the sympathies and love of all. She pleased Hegai, the keeper of the women, and finds favor before him, and likewise with all who see her; she pleases the king, "above all the women," and is lifted up, in her still secret character, to the level of the dignity of queen of the nations, instead of Vashti.

In all these things we see a providential God who directs according to His own purpose the thoughts and hearts of men and the thoughts and heart of the king in order to carry out His plans of grace toward His people. The only wife who may replace the Gentile wife is the Jewish wife, a member of a repudiated people, and the Lord will manifest this when the appropriate moment comes. But, simultaneously with these ways of divine Providence toward Israel, secretly preparing the future reign of His people over the nations, we see how humiliated she was in her actual condition! We see the Jewish wife, forcibly submitted, like a slave of whom one disposes, without

consulting her, to the king of the Gentiles! Her will counts for nothing in this alliance; she is forced into it; such a position might be desirable, in the highest degree, to all the other virgins in the empire; but it could not be desirable for Esther.

That which characterized a Jewish woman was submission and dependence, freely given, as seen in Rebecca, when she said: "I will go;" it was the respectful affection of Sarah, that holy woman who, of her own accord, called Abraham "her lord"; and it was the enthusiastic love of Abigail, throwing herself at David's feet, and aspiring to the role of a handmaiden to his servants in order to serve David himself. It was the daughter in Psalm 45, "[inclining her] ear; and [forgetting her] own people and [her] father's house," a woman whose beauty lay in her abnegation which made her desirable to the king, while she acknowledged his all-powerful Lordship in adoration! In the future this last characteristic will be that of Israel returned in grace to the Lord of glory, the future king of Israel; but here, what a contrast! involuntary, forced subjection to a yoke which was the consequence of the people's sin. The law (Deut. 7:3) forbade these marriages, prescribing that an Israelite not give

his daughter to a Gentile, but here everything had changed: the kings of the nations dominated over the unfaithful Jews; God had withdrawn Himself, and Nehemiah was obliged to say: "Behold, we are servants this day... The kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins... have dominion over our bodies." (Neh. 9:36-37)

Thus this daughter of Israel is presented to us in this incongruous situation: on the one side, of servitude carrying with it the necessity of hiding her origin; and on the other side, of elevation to royal dignity. Do we not see in her the type of the future wife, first hidden from all eyes, and then publicly recognized by the Lord, the great king of the nations, all of whose ways are righteous and true? (Rev. 15:3)

Esther proves herself submissive to the orders of her counselor. She shows fear toward Ahasuerus, but submission and dependence toward Mordecai — "[she] did what Mordecai told her, like as when she was brought up with him" — united to wisdom which discerns in all things what is appropriate; and to prudence which compromises neither her adoptive father nor

her people; and to patience which is able to wait for the appropriate timing; and to decision which takes hold of that occasion; and to confidence committing herself in all respects to the instructions of Mordecai, whose word is for Esther like the word of God. In this regard, it is very striking, as we have already pointed out, that at a time when the Scriptures were known and taught among the Jews, this book does not mention them even once. Nevertheless, Esther has faith in the Word, the word pronounced by a man, who would not have had anything but very tenuous rights to be listened to, but who, for Esther's heart, personifies divine authority.

How all these features characterize this book, where even prayer and supplication are not mentioned; for they could not be addressed to a God who had turned away from the people who had dishonored Him. Nevertheless the connection remains despite everything, but it was visible only to God. Underneath all this surface of moral desert and foreign bondage, we find the hidden river, escaping the eagle's eye, but not the eye of faith which can follow it in its secret detours, and which waits only for the moment when it will gush up in broad daylight, at

Israel's restoration. We come across this secret at every turn. The world openly pursues its course, great men make their decisions, and the king approves them — and nevertheless all these things are mysteriously decided by Him who directs as He will the spirits, projects, and decisions of men, and does not allow any of them, unless it be to accomplish His own purposes, and to finally bring about their display in public.

Mordecai himself secretly watches over Esther with touching solicitude (v. 11), which does not prevent him from keeping watch over the person of the king, whom God had given him, through the fault of the people, as master. All this is very lovely, and reveals that Mordecai had a great understanding of the mind of God as well as a rare submission to His will. When the plot of the two eunuchs comes to his knowledge, while he "[is] in the king's gate," he did not hesitate for an instant to have recourse to Esther in order to expose this treacherous plan and thus protect the life of Ahasuerus.

In this chapter, the beautiful character of this man of God begins to reveal itself. He substitutes himself for the parents

which Esther had lost, and he welcomes her into his home. In a sense, this is a divine role: "For had my father and my mother forsaken me, then had Jehovah taken me up." (Ps. 27:10) He brings her up with care and watches over her with the loving concern of a mother; then, in his relations with the royal court, he openly watches out for the king's welfare, seated at his gate, so as to avert any danger from his person. Since Esther's fortune was connected to Ahasuerus' existence, Mordecai becomes the king's savior, and then silently withdrew, asking nothing for himself, and allowing Providence (all that remained to his oppressed nation) to direct him. It was Providence which had led those two chamberlains to expose their projects in Mordecai's presence. Providence had prepared Esther's ear to receive this communication; Providence had arranged that these matters be recorded in the book of the chronicles in the king's very presence. More and more, the hidden current follows its course to lead us to final deliverance under a reign of peace and righteousness.

Esther, the Jewess, who has become the wife of the one who exercises supreme power, was publicly acknowledged by the

king who sets the crown on her head, and makes a great feast in her honor, "Esther's feast." But although she is acknowledged as the queen, what she really is had not yet been manifested. Mordecai, who in fact, had all authority over her, had commanded her not to make known her birth. The case will be the same at the time of the end. Before the Lord publicly acknowledges the origin of His Jewish wife (whom the promises and counsels of God destine to reign over the nations), He will have His wife (although she will not yet be publicly manifested), in the form of a despised and the persecuted remnant, who will nevertheless find grace in the eyes of many, but whose beauty will be known by her Husband before He can present her to the world. Then the Jewish wife will not be disobedient, as the Gentile wife was. She will be, on earth, the pure reflection of the glory of her Husband, just as the true Church, glorified, will be in heaven.

Chapter 3

Haman.

As we approach chapter 3, note its relationship with the preceding chapters. The main subject of Esther 1 is the disobedience of the Gentile wife. After these things (Esther 2:1), the Jewish wife appears in Esther 2, hidden from the eyes of all as far as her origin is concerned, but already loved and acknowledged by the sovereign ruler before the great tribulation which will fall on the remnant of Judah and Benjamin. After these things (Esther 3:1), we find in Esther 3, the appearance of the hereditary enemy, supported by the head of the nations and drawing his authority from him. He becomes, with the complicity of the empire, the promoter of the great tribulation; but the grace of God delivers the people out of the hand of the enemy, in order to give Mordecai and Esther the first place in the kingdom.

Now let us take account of the origin and character of Haman. He was the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. (v. 1) Agag was the title of the kings of Amalek, probably a generic title, as was

the title of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. (1 Sam. 15:9, 32; Num. 24:7) Thus Haman came from this royal race. Amalek, the people of Haman, descended from Esau, through Eliphaz: he was primitively a chief, and then became the people of Edom. (Gen. 36; 12, 16) Indeed, under Hezekiah, we see that the remnant of Amalek lived among the Edomites, that is to say in "the mountain of Seir," the territory of these Edomites. Amalek occupied the south-east region of the Seir mountains, and probably part of the wilderness of Sin and of the wilderness of Paran. This geographical position explains the capital interest Amalek had (Ex. 17) in opposing Israel's onward march to enter Canaan; for Amalek occupied the first buttressing range of mountains in Palestine and defended the southern frontier (Num. 13:30; Num. 15:45; 1 Sam. 14; 7; 1 Sam. 27:8) on which side this country could be most easily penetrated.

A various intervals, we see Amalek in league with other nations against Israel. Thus, in Judges 3:12-13, we see Amalek in league with Moab, which explains the mention of Agag in Balaam's prophecy against Balak, the king of Moab. (Num. 24:7) In Judges 6:3, we see Amalek associated with Midian in a com-

mon hatred directed against the people of God. The Amalekites were defeated by Saul (1 Sam. 15), and finally by David (1 Sam. 27, 30), according to Balaam's prophecy concerning the "Star [which should come] out of Jacob, and a Scepter [which should] rise out of Israel." Then, the prophecy goes on to say, "Amalek [was] the first of the nations, but his latter end [should] be for destruction." (Num. 24:17-20) As a fulfilled prophecy, this star is David; and, as a prophecy yet to be fulfilled, this star is Christ, David's Son.

And so, in Amalek we have to do with the enemy of the people of God. It is Amalek who is the first to oppose Israel's forward march, when they came out of Egypt (Ex. 17), who mercilessly pursued Israel and exterminated the weak, and the stragglers among a people wearied in crossing the wilderness. Amalek is, in a word, the Enemy; the image of Satan, the great Enemy. He opposes the purposes of grace of God toward His people.

Without the intercession of Moses on the mountain and without Joshua, he would have annihilated the people. When the people had taken possession of the land, he sought to destroy them

little by little. Although he was finally conquered by David, he did not yet consider the struggle as finished. Now that the people are captive, reduced by their unfaithfulness to the last degree of humiliation, he stirs up the person of Haman the Agagite to exterminate the weak remnant of this people and, let us not forget, his hidden purpose is to take Israel away from Christ, the king according to the counsels and promises of God. Could there be a deceitful plan more satanic than that? Although frustrated in his efforts, as this book teaches us, Satan does not consider himself beaten. He attacks the very Leader of Israel, Christ. At His birth, he attempts to put Him to death, by means of a new Agag, in the massacre at Bethlehem. He is once again disappointed and at the scene of the cross he raises up the entire world against Christ; and it is at the very moment when he thinks that he has triumphed through death, that he is conquered once and for all. Nevertheless he will continue to conspire to the very end against the Lord, His Anointed, and His people. And so the Lord has sworn that He "will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." (Ex. 17:16) Israel must not forget to wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from

under the sun (Deut. 25:19), a terrible judgment, comparable to no other in the Word, unless it be to the judgment of Edom, which belonged to Amalek!

Let us now return to the book of Esther. Israel is enslaved, defenseless and rejected; all alone, the off-shoot of a reproved royal family resists the Agagite. Everything favors the plans of Haman. But although he hates the people, he directs his wrath against their head, the only one who refuses to bow down before him and reverence him: an obscure image of Him who, at a time yet future, would refuse to acknowledge Satan, when, from the mountain top, he would show Him the kingdoms of the earth. Will this descendant of Agag, — who suddenly appears on the scene, and who comes from who knows where, but who is now raised to a position of highest dignity by the king of the nations (who elevates him up and sets his seat above all the princes) -, this sworn enemy of Israel, this Wicked man, succeed in his designs? If we turn to the end of the prophetic history of Israel, we will take account more exactly of all that this scene signifies. In Revelation we find a sort of satanic trinity in league against Christ and against His

people. Firstly, there is Satan, whose spirit animates the powers of this world; then there is the head of the fourth empire (just as Ahasuerus was the head of the second empire), and finally there is the Antichrist. The Antichrist will be exalted by the sovereign ruler of the fourth empire as Haman was exalted by Ahasuerus. Will Israel, like a poor, fearful bird, escape out of the bird-catcher's net? We learn, from prophecy, the entire satanic plot to annihilate the remnant of Israel will not succeed any better than the plot concocted in the history of Esther.

We have already sought to describe the character of Ahasuerus and the character of Esther. We will develop and summarize of the character of Mordecai in the course of this account. But first of all we may draw the portrait of the enemy who reappears here in such a sudden way. He is marked by unmanageable pride, the desire to exalt and deify himself, terrible hatred directed against the people of God and against the one who represents them. In order to revenge himself of him, the enemy sacrifices the entire nation. Finally, he is characterized by deceit and infernal craftiness to obtain his murderous purposes. In a word, he is the spirit of wickedness incarnated. Is he

not the same one who says: "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, and let the name of Israel be mentioned no more"? (Ps. 83:4) Can Mordecai, the "poor man" who is defenseless, resist him? Will the wonderful deliverance of the people be renewed now that Israel is no longer the people of God? Now that there is no more Moses or Aaron to intercede for them, and no more Joshua to lead them? Now that a simple decree from the king is enough to wipe them out entirely? Will Amalek triumph here, when Israel has no weapons and no resources? But did he triumph over Christ at Bethlehem, in the wilderness, or on the cross? On all these occasions, the victory of Christ was complete, and His victory was won on behalf of the people: on the cross by giving Himself and in the wilderness by simple dependence on the word of God. But, for Mordecai, the word of God is silent. Nowhere do we find it in this account, and there is a reason for this (although in fact it existed in the midst of the people). Does Mordecai then have any resource to avoid death? Nothing could be easier, some will say. Let him accept the king's decree and reverence Haman. But no: Mordecai remembers that there will always be war

against Amalek. He will not bow down before the Agagite any more than Daniel would bow down before Darius. The only difference is that Daniel was forbidden to bow down before God, whereas Mordecai was ordered to bow down and reverence Haman. A true figure of Christ in anticipation, Mordecai refuses to do this. Like his Master, he can say: "Get away behind me, Satan!" There is perpetual war against Amalek. There is no other reason for his resistance to give those around him, but the fact that he is a Jew. (v. 4) He cannot, like Daniel, openly declare by his attitude that he is a servant of God, for everyone could ask him: "Where is your God?" This explains that while on the one hand he forbade Esther to declare her origin, on the other hand he is bound to declare his own origin* This declaration makes us think of the Lord's good confession at Gethsemane: "I am [he];" only this confession drew down judgment on Christ alone, so that His own might be delivered, whereas the confession of Mordecai brings down vengeance on all his people. This attitude is in nowise one of pride in Mordecai. He fully recognizes the rights of the head of the nations over him and over his people (rights ordained by God as

chastening) but in no way does he recognize the rights of Amalek. Although he is placed under judgment and although he belongs to the rejected royal line through the flesh, which God no longer recognizes, nevertheless he obeys the word of God, kept in his heart, by refusing to bow down to Amalek.

- * This is a good confession, the only testimony that he could give of his relationship with the God of Israel, but a testimony sufficient to unleash the anger of the enemy against himself.

There is great beauty in Mordecai's character. We have already seen his tender and delicate care for the captive daughter of Israel. Now we see his courageous determination to obey the commandment of God, standing firm, unshakable, even though it may cost him dearly, walking in all the dignity of an Israelite, fallen to the lowest level no doubt, but the object, despite everything, of the promises (not to be repented of) and of God's election.

Like the fury of the Antichrist against those who do not acknowledge his power and authority, and who refuse to bear his mark on their forehead and hands, the fury of Haman against a

man who despises his person and refuses his yoke, knows no limits. But he would have scorned to put Mordecai alone to death. He must strike him down together with all his people. Haman cast Pur (that is, the lot) in order to know when this extermination should take place. He believes in this superstitious practice, just as later the Antichrist will consult the "god of fortresses" (Dan. 11:38), for even the most incredulous man must have some religion: a fact we may observe every day.

Vashti had rebelled in the third year of Ahasuerus' reign, Esther became the king's wife in the seventh year, and the lot is cast at the beginning of the twelfth year of his reign. The lot indicates the twelfth month for the massacre of the Jews. Why not the third or the fourth month, in order to take away any chance of escape from the oppressed people? Is it not once again hidden Providence which directs everything as always? What can the "oppressor of the Jews" (Esther 9:10, 24) do in the face of the secret counsels of Providence? He is obliged to obey the lot he has consulted, and right there his rapid course to death and judgment begins. He has no difficulty in convincing the king of the necessity of annihilating the Jews: "There is a people

scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from [those of] every people, and they keep not the king's law; and it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." Haman proposes to enrich the king through this destruction: "I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those that have charge of the affairs, to bring [it] into the king's treasuries." Ahasuerus refuses the silver and delivers the people up to Haman, "to do with them as seems good to [him]." What indifference, what a hardened heart we find in this king! The name of Israel has no significance for him. He fights against the Lord whom his fathers had known, but whom he himself does not know, but the fortune of a multitude of his subjects does not matter to him in the least. One of his favorites, a wicked man, is more important to a sovereign ruler who ought be concerned with his people, than the existence of an entire nation! How different he is from his father Darius and from Cyrus, his ancestor! This decree which causes consternation in all the provinces of the empire, will no doubt also extend as far as to reach and exterminate the remnant returned to Jerusalem through the decree of Cyrus, and

maintained by his successors, and the king does not remember this decree! "Do with them as it seems good to thee," he says — that is to say, do evil with impunity! The royal ring ornaments Haman's hand, who sets its seal to his murderous decrees.

Haman writes "in the name of king Ahasuerus," and in appearance acts as his humble servant in affairs that the king himself has resolved and decreed. Similar circumstances will be renewed at the time of the end. The Antichrist will make himself the servant of the Roman Beast (Rev. 13:14-16), in order to carry out his own plans. The satanic plan of Haman begins with the pride and ambition of this man, who prefers to crush everything under his feet than to see them subjected to Christ. The decree is quickly carried throughout the provinces of the vast empire, due to a system of communication which would be the wonder of the world, if it had not been surpassed a thousand times by the present generation.

During this time "the king and Haman sat down to drink!" In the one there was a lack of conscience and in the other there

was satanic joy in evil. Wine (in which man forgets himself, which keeps him in his indifference, which engenders violence, and which provokes the enjoyment of brutality in the midst of the ruins which it accumulates) seals this intimate alliance between the prince of darkness and the deified sovereign over the nations!

The city of Shushan, accustomed to everything but such butchery, a capital city used to pageantry, pleasure, and refined civilization, was in consternation. Whereas the majority of the Jews who lived there were literally crushed by this unexpected news.

Only twelve more months and the slaying would be accomplished. All the spoils of the people would belong to the Amalekite. Only twelve more months... but the God who was hidden from every eye is keeping watch, and His judgment is close at hand.

Chapter 4

The great tribulation

The death sentence has been pronounced. The entire remnant of Judah and Benjamin is under this threat, which no human law can change, for the decree is irrevocable*

* As we have said before, although, according to the design of this book (which forms a typical episode of the history of the captive people) there is no mention of the people returned to Judea, there is no doubt that they must be included in the massacre; for in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah we see them up against the violent hatred of their enemies.

Mordecai, with his garments torn, covered in sackcloth and ashes, goes out into the city, giving vent to his desolation with a "loud and bitter cry." He no longer even has access to the king's gate, for mourning and weeping are not tolerated in his presence. Everywhere, in the provinces, there is mourning, fasting, weeping and wailing among the Jews. Esther herself is in great anguish. Do we not see here a weak anticipatory image "of the great tribulation" in the future, "such as has not been

from [the] beginning of [the] world until now, nor ever shall be; and if those days had not been cut short, no flesh had been saved"? (Matt. 24:21-22) But how can we speak of resource, when there is none, and when any access to a righteously irritated God is intercepted? This is indeed what this unparalleled tribulation will consist of. When the head of the nations, indifferent to evil, delivers the people into the hands of their fierce, heartless, unscrupulous enemy, who can they run to? There is not a single ray of hope!

And yet there is still one ray of hope, although it is very weak indeed. That ray of hope is that Esther "should go in unto the king, to make supplication to him, and to make request before him, for her people." Mordecai commands her to do this; but of what use is his commandment when even access to the king's presence is closed? Esther charges her messenger to tell Mordecai this fact: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces do know that whoever, whether man or woman, shall come to the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law, to put [him] to death, except [such] to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may

live; and I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." (v. 11) If Esther appears before Ahasuerus without being invited (and he has neglected her for thirty days), she will be put to death, unless... feeble resource... unless the king is pleased to hold out the golden scepter to her. Thus the only means of escape is the grace of the one clothed with sovereign authority. But can Esther count on this grace? Not at all: everything depends on the king's good pleasure. Can one count on the good pleasure of one who has just, with a single word, erased an entire people from the land of the living? Can one address God? God hides Himself. Humble oneself? Yes, certainly, it is possible to mourn, wail, lament and acknowledge the sin which led the people, once called the people of God, to such an extremity. But there again, will this loud and bitter cry find an echo? Thus this time of tribulation cannot be terminated except by the word of grace, come out of the mouth of the sovereign Judge. Mordecai understands this: "Imagine not in thy heart that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at his time, then there shall arise relief and deliverance to the Jews from another

place; but thou and thy father's house shall perish." Here we see Mordecai's faith: his faith is resolutely attached to deliverance in whatever way and from whatever direction it may come. "And who knows whether thou art [not] come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Is it not possible that the secret, providential ways which have placed you on the throne are in view of this time of distress? Esther's answer to Mordecai shows her wisdom, faith, devotion, self-abnegation, and her love for her people: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are found in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise, and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." The feeble resource of possible grace, but grace surrounded with insurmountable difficulties, causes her to consider the law as barring any way out, and if she does not find grace, she will suffer, if necessary, death under the provisions of the law. And as Esther obeys Mordecai's commandment, so Mordecai now acts in accordance with Esther's commandment.

Surely this is a marvelous scene! Tribulation gives birth to perfect communion in the hearts of these believers as well as all the sentiments of devotion and self-abnegation, which God can approve of and acknowledge. The ways of God toward them produce in these afflicted souls: faith — which has no resource but grace, uncertain as yet, of which they do not feel worthy. But no matter what, "faith is [the] substance of things hoped for," and this expression of Mordecai is the proof of it: "[There shall] arise relief and deliverance... from another place." Is not faith the pendant of these words: "How long," so often repeated in the Psalms in similar circumstances?

But all this leads to the conclusion that now Esther must make herself known: the great tribulation will bring to light the character of the Jewish remnant. Until then Esther had remained hidden; now, in this trial, her origin will appear in broad daylight. At the moment when God intervenes, the nation will be publicly recognized. The testimony of the Wife is born in persecution, it will shine in all its splendor, and it is produced in tribulation; but it is based on grace.

At last the hour is about to strike when the nations will no longer ask; "Where is their God?"

Chapter 5

Esther is received in grace. Haman betrays himself.

Let us remark again, in view of what is to follow, that the book of Esther (which is very different from its contemporaries, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah) presents types, but types which are more or less hidden, in relation with its character generally speaking. If this book did not exist, there would have been a blank in the divine writings. At the time of the great tribulation, which this book pre-figures, will there still be a resource for the remnant absent from Jerusalem and dispersed among the nations? Yes. In the book of Esther we see a Jewish wife received in grace by the one who represents the supreme authority and she is so received, after the Gentile wife has been repudiated. After the favor which is shown to her, this wife will be publicly recognized in respect to her origin, raised up in dignity and

honor as the Jewish queen of the nations, the object of her husband's affections, she, whose "honorable women" shall be "kings' daughters." (Ps. 45:9) Esther represents the Jewish remnant according to the Lord's heart, become the center of the renewed people. But moreover, in this time of tribulation, a savior of the people is revealed to us in this book — Mordecai, subjected to all the consequences of Israel's unfaithfulness and to the yoke of the nations, by himself alone undertakes to resist Haman the Agagite, the Jews' adversary. He resists at the risk of his own life, but is delivered from death, whose borders he merely glimpses; (in contrast to Him who alone could taste death in its terrible reality and come forth victorious.) Mordecai is delivered to be, as we shall see, raised up in supreme honor and at to at last secure peace for his people. All this is more or less obscure and must be so, at a time when God had turned His face aside from His people; but this people finds in supreme grace a resource which can be taken hold of only by faith. Thus the remnant will be saved from the great tribulation. Although faith alone can take hold of and acknowledge this resource, the fulfillment of this deliverance also depends of the

faithfulness of Esther. The situation is the same in the Psalms, which contain both the cry of faith, counting on God's grace, and the integrity of the hearts which are faithful to the word and commandments of the Lord. Likewise Esther obeys Mordecai's commandment, whatever the risks of her comportment may be. Thus deliverance depends on sovereign grace on the one hand, and on the other hand on the faith and faithfulness of the Jewish wife.

Trusting in Mordecai's word, Esther presents herself before the king. Hardly does the king see her, but he extends the scepter of gold toward her. She is received in grace! How her heart must overflow with joy! Deliverance is not yet accomplished, but the grace which brings deliverance has appeared to Esther's eyes. "What wilt thou, queen Esther," says the king, "and what is thy request? it shall be given thee even to the half of the kingdom." From the very first instant, she is sure of sharing half of the king's possessions. Her requests may extend far beyond the limits of all she desired to ask him. But as long as the Enemy is powerful, the prudence of a serpent must be combined with the simplicity of a dove. Esther postpones her re-

quest to a later time and invites the king and Haman to her feast, and thus she offers the king the occasion to confirm his promise. (See v. 3 and 6) Now a confirmed promise, in which the sovereign alone was engaged, could not be annulled.

How this scene differs from the one we see take place in Mark 6. There another king, Herod, says the same words to the daughter of Herodias: "Whatsoever thou shalt ask me I will give thee, to half of my kingdom." But Herod spoke out of a heart inflamed by his guilty desires, and the young woman who answered him desired the murder of Christ's forerunner, the witness and prophet of the great King. Satan inspired all that — Satan, the murder who reigns by means of lust. Here, what a difference we find! The king's affection is attracted by the grace of his wife. She presents herself to him, and he desires her — he who has legitimate rights over her. But, although he had neglected her for a time, when she returns to him, after three days of fasting, bearing on her face the traces of her anguish and sufferings, his interest is awakened, and his heart goes out to meet her, granting her everything in advance, and she has only to ask in the certainty of obtaining an answer at

her very first word. We discover God behind all this scene, and if Ahasuerus, called to represent Him, is a bottom but an unworthy creature, spoiled by omnipotence, nevertheless God, the God of Israel, uses this power and his right to exercise grace, in order to signal His own character and to accomplish His purposes.

As we have said, under divine inspiration, Esther has the prudence of a serpent. In order for judgment to fall on Haman, it is necessary that his pride and hatred reach their full measure, and he must be found in the presence of the race which he desires to exterminate — the race whose defense has been taken up by God Himself. The first meal offered by Esther only exalts his pride, but "all this is of no avail to me so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate," he says. (v. 13) The things that Satan offers men in order to seduce them are always of this nature. When men possess them, like Haman, who attained the satisfaction of his pride, they are of no more use, as long as a new lust has not yet been satisfied. Thus sinners are led from one lustful desire to another, from one illusion to another, until the day of judgment. Here, Haman's hatred, which

cannot be quenched except by the murder of Mordecai, is about to lead him into direct contact with the God of vengeance who protects His servant. What will be the lot of the Agagite when this happens? His fall is prepared, just like that of Shebna: "There shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, O shame of thy Lord's house! And I will drive thee from thine office, and from they station will I pull thee down." (Isa. 22:18-19)

The satanic hatred of Haman is even stronger than his pride. All his glory has no more value, as long as he has not executed vengeance. His friends and his wife encourage him: "Go in merrily with the king to the banquet." He has all the congratulations the world can offer him, at the price of saying to him, after having flattered his lusts: "[Thou] wilt certainly fall before him." (Esther 6:13)

All this is an image, not only of the struggle between Haman and Mordecai, but also between Satan and Christ. The Adversary must completely unmask himself before God intervenes. At the cross, Satan said: Everything is worthless to me,

as long as I am not rid of Christ. Fear of seeing Him take up omnipotence and sovereignty, fear of seeing himself replaced in his own domain by the Holy and Just, and fear of seeing the Lord fulfill His plans of grace in the salvation of His people, force the Enemy to completely unveil himself at the cross, by putting Jesus to death. And, as in the book of Esther, this scene takes place at the very moment when God hides His face from Christ! Here, as there, a solitary man is in question; in His career of humiliation, Christ had "saved others," just as Mordecai had saved the king himself. And what did this man, Mordecai, ask for, what did he receive as a reward? Nothing: no more than the Savior, of whom he is a weak type. In love, he had tenderly cared for and welcomed the daughter of his people, as a hen gathers her chicken under her wings. What had he reaped? Nothing. The gallows is prepared for him: fifty cubits high; he can see it rise above the palace of the city of Shushan. What does he do to escape it? Nothing. This man walks with integrity, lives a hidden life, observes the law, serves others, suffers and weeps over their sorrows, and meets nothing but a gallows at the end of his career. Yes, just as in our account here, Satan

unmasks himself at the cross, and God remains hidden. God seems to be weak in the face of the triumph of the Wicked One; His servant is weak in the presence of the formidable power of the Enemy; but the weakness of God is stronger than men or Satan himself, and God glorifies Himself in the end through judgment of the Adversary, the exaltation of Christ and the salvation of those whom He loves!

Chapter 6

The secret ways of Providence.

The secret providence of God on behalf of His people appears in this chapter in a most remarkable way. The world calls it chance; the believer discerns the hand of God and worships Him. If a believer should thankfully recall the thousands of occasions in his life when, through circumstances, apparently accidental, God has preserved him or led him without his knowing it, what would these individual acts of help be compared to what we see here? God extends His protection over a man in order to save an entire people, and He delivers Mordecai so

that Israel may be delivered. Now, as we have already seen, in this book, which is so simple in appearance, but which is so full of mysteries in reality, Mordecai is a type of Christ; except that Christ alone passed through death itself in order to deliver us, (for, since all were dead, He must die for all.) An Isaac goes no further than the sentence of death. A David is appointed to death every day, under the pressure of his enemy. A Jonah is swallowed alive in the belly of the fish, and comes out alive, after having passed through death in figure; a Mordecai sees the fifty (thirty: commentary text) cubit high gallows but is never hung from it; and it is only thus, that along with so many other typical personages, that Mordecai can offer us a picture of Christ. Christ alone was hung from the cross, to bear our sins, to be made a curse for us, to gather together the scattered children of God, and to become the center of attraction for all men. Nevertheless these types illustrate in a marvelous way the thoughts of God and reveal their depths. In an altogether different way than Mordecai, Christ passed through the tribulation of Israel in His soul at Gethsemane, under the governmental wrath of God. Much more than Mordecai, Christ cried "with a loud

and bitter cry" to Him who could save Him both Himself and His people from the darkness of death. And much more than Mordecai, Christ was heard because of His piety. But, unlike Mordecai, His blessed relationship with God His Father was never interrupted. Except during the three hours of darkness, they have always been complete and entire. Even at Gethsemane, Jesus said: Abba, Father, when in the anguish of the combat, He passed through the tribulation of His people in anticipation. On the cross, before the dark hours of abandon, He said: "Father, forgive them," and after those hours He said: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." That is because, although He passed through the tribulation in all its intensity at Gethsemane (see Ps. 102), He did so as a holy, innocent, undefiled Being, voluntarily substituting Himself for His people, whereas the remnant of Israel will pass through it as a consequence of their individual and collective sins. The moral tribulation at Gethsemane was the act of one solitary Man, prophetically substituting Himself in grace for the future remnant, so that the remnant might be encouraged by learning that their Substitute had been delivered and that consequently there

would be deliverance for those who belong to Him. But furthermore, the tribulation of Israel is destined, in the ways of God, to produce repentance in the people. Mordecai's faith realizes this through fasting, sack cloth and ashes: he realizes it obscurely, no doubt, for he cannot withdraw for an instant from the position in which God's indignation has placed both himself and his nation. He does not even dare (we speak here of what we find in the book of Esther) lift up his voice to God, as Jesus did at Gethsemane.

But let us return to the principal subject of this chapter, to the mysterious ways of the providence of God toward His people. Here, questions tumble from our lips, and the result of these events alone can give us the answer. The gallows is set up for Mordecai. Haman's plan, skillfully concocted, seems headed for sure success. Why, on this very same night, should sleep escape the king? Why should the idea come to him of having the book of his annals read to him in order to soothe his insomnia? Why did the reader fall on the passage about Mordecai? Why did the king ask about the distinctions conferred on his savior? What was the origin of his question: "Who is in the court?"

Why should Haman come, at this precise instant, to solicit his master to execute Mordecai? Why should the king phrase his question in such a way to Haman, that it should cause his favorite to fall into the trap? Why is Haman himself obliged to become the herald of the man whom he hates with all the strength of his soul?

It is because, in order to save the people, Mordecai must first be saved. What could be the further use of the gallows which had been set up, since Mordecai had been publicly recognized as the man whom the king delighted to honor. One man must become the liberator of the people (and here again we find in Mordecai such an interesting type of Christ which is so interesting); and to this end, it was necessary that after having humbled himself to the lowest degree, in sackcloth and ashes, he should be raised to supreme dignity. It was necessary that the Omnipotent should make him (in image) Lord and Christ. Nevertheless, all these honors conferred on him do not prevent Mordecai from keeping his place as a servant: he returns to "the king's gate." (v. 12) Certainly unlike Haman (who lifted himself up in his measureless pride, and desired to be served by

all), here Mordecai presents a type of Christ. He came to take the form of a servant, not, it is true, out of constraint like Mordecai, but freely in love, coming to subject Himself, to serve, and to lay down His life. Like Mordecai, He was exalted by anticipation to the holy mountain, and came down from it to immediately take up His service again. But much more than this, after having suffered the cross, he was exalted to the right hand of the Father and continuing His service from that position, He washes the feet of His disciples. And lastly, after He shall have been fully acknowledged by all, He will still continue to serve His heavenly people and His earthly people, "accepted of the multitude of his brethren." (Esther 10:3)

Haman's friends, his wise men, and even his wife begin to open their eyes: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but wilt certainly fall before him." (v. 13) Where is their sympathy for the man who presents himself before them "mourning and having his head covered"? Only the previous evening they had said to him: "Go in merrily,"; now they do not have a single comforting word for this downcast, wicked man.

"Thou hast begun to fall... [thou] wilt certainly fall before him." This bitterness is added to all his other bitter experiences, at the moment when tribulation strikes his own person. Can anything else be expected from the selfishness of natural hearts? As long as misfortune does not strike them personally, what does it matter? The man who distributed favors to them can do nothing more for them. Not a single one of them even attempts to suggest to him a means of escaping his misfortune. Every resource fails him. He has no external support and he no longer has even the internal support of his own pride. Willingly or not, he must meet his appointed lot, for at that very moment, "the king's chamberlains came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared." Oh! how that expression: "To-morrow also I am invited to her with the king," turns against him. The sun of his glory is darkened. This banquet is a storm-laden cloud, bringing the lightening about to strike his guilty head!

Chapter 7

Esther reveals her origin.

The hour of the banquet has come. For the third time Ahasuerus repeats to Esther his offer of half of his kingdom. Whatever may happen, she may have full confidence since the promise has been confirmed twice by the king's own mouth. And so she now becomes quite bold: "If I have found grace in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition and my people at my request; for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the adversary could not compensate the king's damage." The moment has come when the Jewish wife unveils her origin before the Gentile power whose favor she has gained.

Here we have the second phase of the history of Esther, of the history of the remnant. In the first phase, Esther is in servitude to the nations; her beauty and grace only accentuate this servitude. She is forbidden to make herself known until the power

of wickedness, represented by Haman, reaches its full measure. But when Mordecai, in whom we have a type of Christ, is attacked by the enemy who seeks to be rid of him; when, already exalted by the supreme power, the designs of the enemy against him seem about to be accomplished, Esther reveals herself and, being unable to allow Haman to carry the victory, she proclaims her relationship with the people of God whom she calls: "My people;" and she does this in the presence of the sovereign ruler who is infinitely favorable toward her and who cherishes her. She has followed, so to speak, all the steps by which Mordecai has passed. When he was hidden, she was hidden herself, all the while having a place of favor in the heart of the sovereign ruler, and while no one yet knew that she was Jewish. When Mordecai is exalted, before he obtains omnipotence over the nations — at once Esther reveals herself as belonging to the people of Him who does not yet have the government of the nations in hand, but who is lifted up in the eyes of one and all, and manifested as having the right to royal dignity. The appointed time has come. The Lord will rise up and have compassion on Zion. (Ps. 102:13) The hour has struck; Already Mordecai's

glory is shown before his government is established; how can one refrain from openly declaring that one belongs to the people of God?

The first manifestation of glory is not yet the establishment of his reign. Speaking of this glory, it is said in Zechariah 2:8: "After the glory, has he sent me unto the nations that made you a spoil; for he that touches you touches the apple of his eye." Thus it is that after the glory of Mordecai, Esther is acknowledged as the Jewish wife, and the enemies of Israel become the prey of the people whom they had brought into bondage. If it had been a question of increasing Israel's servitude "[by selling them] for bondmen and bondwomen" Esther could have remained silent, but could she still do so, when her protector is lifted up in dignity, and when it is a question of annihilating her people? At this very moment Haman is judged. This will also be the moment when the Antichrist, in whom Satan will be personified, will be thrown down from his great height and will be broken in the abyss.

After these things, we see the third phase of Esther's history: the peaceful possession of the kingdom, under the sovereign power and under the administration of Mordecai, a type of Christ to whom this administration will be confided. But, in our chapter, we still find ourselves in the second phase, when Esther obtains, as the earnest of what has been promised to her, vengeance upon the enemy. This enemy is at last revealed as "the Adversary, the Enemy, the Wicked one": names which the Word gives to Satan and to the Antichrist. It is too late for him; anguish assails this man who had sought the death of the righteous, and whose foolishness had gone so far as to attack Israel's protector! The wrath of the king is not appeased until Haman is hung from the gallows which he had destined for Mordecai. Haman's judgment is executed, as the judgment of the Antichrist will be, before God has intervened for the complete deliverance of His people. But Esther (the remnant of Judah) is recognized in her royal dignity and as belonging the people of God, before the Antichrist is cast down.

Chapter 8

Mordecai administers the kingdom

Deliverance is at hand; but first, Esther declares what Mordecai is to her (no longer merely her origin and the people to whom she belongs): this is the highest confession of the Jewish wife. She openly declares the ties which attach her to the one who has brought her up when she was an orphan, who has counseled her and re-directed her in all her anguish. Mordecai had already been clothed in royal dignity in the sight of all the inhabitants of Shushan in virtue of the fact that he had "[spoken] good for the king" (Esther 7:9), but this dignity was only moral dignity up to this point, so to speak, and immediately after this, he returned to his position as a servant at the king's gate. (vv. 1, 15) From this point on, he is no longer at the gate; he comes before the king. His dignity becomes effective and official. He is clothed in "royal apparel of blue and white;" he wears a "great crown of gold," and receives the royal ring which confers on him the authority of administration over the peoples of the kingdom. All this is no doubt a hidden image,

like all the images of this book, but in it faith discovers the Man Christ Jesus, clothed in the attributes, the prerogatives, and the responsibilities of supreme power by the Sovereign who possesses this power.* Indeed, Christ, as Man, depends on God; He will receive from God the reins of government, and will return them to His Father's hands, after having administered the kingdom for His glory.

* We cannot repeat often enough that, on account of his natural character, Ahasuerus is one of the sorriest sovereign rulers of Persia. He was violent, but had no will power; he lacked self-control; he yielded to evil as well as to good, according to the influences upon him; he was unaware of his carelessness when he revoked a decision, never attributing to himself, but to others, the evil which he would otherwise have accomplished, or at least tolerated and encouraged (cf. Esther 8:7) But, quite apart from his merits and his character, power is vested in him, so that, on certain occasions, he is not represented to us as what he is morally, but as the bearer of supreme power. Thus it is said: "Ye are gods" (John 10:34) and: "There is no authority except from God." (Rom. 13:1)

From this point on, Mordecai passes verdicts in favor of the people of God, (verdicts which Haman, the satanic man, had passed previously for the purpose of destroying them.) Esther gives him the right to all that had belonged to Haman; as Liberator, he takes the place usurped by the oppressor of the Jews. But Esther has yet one more duty to fulfill toward the one who possesses supreme authority. She speaks to Ahasuerus, throws herself at his feet, weeps and supplicates him. Before, she had fasted and had neither eaten nor drunk for three days; now, she humbles herself before the sovereign and implores his grace. He alone, her legitimate husband, can turn the calamity aside in grace. He extends the scepter of gold to Esther; then she presents her request, sensing that, in order to see that request fulfilled, she depends entirely upon his grace: "If it please the king and if I have found grace before him, and the thing seem right to the king, and I be pleasing in his sight, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman." (v. 5) This will also be the attitude of the Jewish wife, in the future day when evil, plotted by men against the people, will be at the point of overtaking them. Only grace will be capable of putting an end to

judgment. But how can this take place? Is not the sovereign bound by His own decrees? He is not a son of man that He should repent himself; what He has said will be accomplished. Judgment must be executed; but, instead of falling on the people of Esther, it will fall on their enemies. It is still judgment, but judgment that has been turned aside, through grace, from over the head of those who, after having received at the hand of the Lord double for all their sins, now have need to be comforted. What good news for Esther's heart! Grace speaks to her heart, and tells her that her time of distress is finished.

This entire scene seems to correspond, in some measure, to what we are told about Israel, in Revelation 12, when the serpent casts water out of his mouth like a flood, (a flood of the nations which are under his influence,) to swallow up and destroy the Messiah's people. But the earth, the scene of divine order in the world, opens its mouth and swallows the river. Is that not just what happens here? It is the nations which are swallowed up, and not the people of God, once the government is put in the hands of the only One who is worthy of exercising it, as this mysterious book of Esther indicates to us.

And so, the day determined for Israel's ruin becomes the day of their deliverance, but through judgment and vengeance upon their enemies. The king associates himself with all that takes place. He who, stretching forth the scepter of gold to Esther, had received all her requests in grace, puts his word into action for the rapid fulfillment of what he had promised. (v. 14)

What a change of scene! For souls plunged into the night of despair, the sun has risen. There is light for the Jews "at eventide." (Zech. 14:7) Where apprehension and terror reigned, there is now only joy and happiness. It is a feast day, a day of celebration. One solitary man, Mordecai, has been the instrument and the organizer of this immense deliverance. Joy spreads to the capital of the nations; "the city of Shushan shouted and was glad" (v. 15) as they see the man appear who had already passed through its streets as a savior - now invested with power, wearing a royal garment of blue and white, a great crown and a cloak of byssus and purple. But also the terror of the Jews falls on a great number of the peoples of the land, who become Jews in order to escape judgment.

The same thing will happen at the time of the end. "In those days shall ten men take hold, out of all languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard [that] God is with you." (Zech. 8:23) Even before vengeance is executed, the Jews rejoice. Rest, perfect confidence are born in their hearts, with the appearance of Him who alone can turn aside wrath from over the head of the people. In just this way, the appearance of Christ will put an end to the great tribulation, even before the final blow has been struck. Confidence will fill the hearts of the people, because He who has loved the virgin daughter of Israel, who has carried the captive people in His affections, and who, in all their distress, was in distress, now possesses the Omnipotence to accomplish the glorious designs of His love.

Chapter 9

Full deliverance

This chapter brings us to full deliverance. In Esther 8, the terror of the Jews had driven many people to become Jews in order to escape judgment. In Esther 9:2, "no man could withstand them; for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon all the peoples." Here again we see the secret action of the providence of God in favor of His people. The nations of the empire could have formed a coalition against the tiny Jewish minority which dwelt in their midst, but no one resists before the fear of the Jews. Moreover, "all the princes of the provinces, and the satraps, and the governors and officers of the king, helped the Jews; for the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them." The situation will be the same at the end of the age; the fear that Christ will inspire, will cause "kings [to] shut their mouths at him" (Isa. 52:15) and will oblige them to obey Him. In order to understand the severity of the reprehension of the peoples, we must remember the sentiments which animated all the peoples of the empire against the Jews. If they are overcome with fear when judgment is de-

creed, such was not the case when their animosity seemed about to satiate itself. At that moment, they were the "enemies" of the Jews and "hoped to have power over them" (Esther 9:1) they "hated them" and "sought their hurt." This hatred must necessarily meet its retribution, and, when that moment comes, it was the fear of Mordecai alone which prompted the great men of the empire to "[help] the Jews." "Because of the greatness of thy strength, thine enemies come cringing unto thee," it is said to Christ (Ps. 66:3). And: "Strangers come cringing unto me." (Ps. 18:44)

As for Mordecai, he "was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout the provinces; for the man Mordecai became continually greater." (v. 4) He is a good representation of the Lord forcefully advancing into the possession of His earthly sovereignty. As in the case of David, at the time of his ascension to the throne, this sovereignty is not established by one splendid, theatrical blow, to use a human expression. His royalty has not yet been established, but it is in formation; it will not be conclusive until after the final victory over the last

of his enemies, but his supremacy is acknowledged, before all the nations are subjected to him.

The oppressor of the Jews is judged, as well as his race (vv. 6-10); in the same way the apostate race of the Antichrist will perish in a future day, for the hour of vengeance has struck. Only the people "laid not their hands on the prey" (vv. 10, 15, 16), in accordance with what had been prescribed concerning Amalek or the enemies of Israel. (1 Sam. 15:9; Joshua 6:19-20) It is only a matter of executing God's judgment, without any profit for those who execute it. Ahasuerus accepts this vengeance as a necessity. His capital, where the plot against the Jews had been fomented, is delivered to the judgment of God for one day more than the other cities of the kingdom. Everywhere the fourteenth and fifteenth days become days of joy and feasting and rest.

Thus the year of the great tribulation ends.

The king of the nations no longer appears on the scene except in dependence on Esther and Mordecai; they alone are in question until the end of the chapter. It is Mordecai who, like the fu-

ture Messiah, orders joy and rest. "The Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written to them." They submit themselves to the written word of him who had been unknown and ignored by all and by themselves, and whom God had now exalted in the sight of one and all.*

* The written word of Mordecai takes on a totally new importance in a book where the law is not mentioned even once.

The memorial of these days is perpetuated from age to age. Only one feast, the feast of Purim, is mentioned in this book: it is a new feast which will last forever in commemoration of the deliverance of the earthly people of God. There is perfect harmony between Esther and Mordecai, and the people; what Esther and Mordecai establish, the people establish for themselves. (v. 31) What is "written in the book" (v. 32) on the occasion of their fasting and their cry, is celebrated in all generations. Thus ends this account which leads us to the dawn of the glorious time which follows deliverance, and leads us prophetically to the threshold of the millennial reign of Christ.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

Esther 10 is a sort of appendix, summarizing in a few words the final result of the preceding events. The sovereign power, which Ahasuerus represents, sees, after the deliverance of the Jews, all the land, and far beyond it, the isles of the sea which did not belong originally to the king, submit themselves to him and pay him tribute: a weak image of the establishment of the kingdom over the entire world.

Mordecai is a great man, exalted by the king and established second after Ahasuerus, that is to say occupying a subordinate position in relation to the supreme power. Such will be the exaltation of Christ, as head of the nations. As Isaiah says: "My servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee — his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the children of men — so shall he astonish many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him, for what had not been told them

shall they see, and what they had not heard shall they consider." (Isa. 52:13-15; see also Mal. 1:11)

But the character of Mordecai in relation to his people is especially noted here; — "[He was] great among the Jews," prospering in his magnificence (Ps. 45:4); — "accepted of the multitude of his brethren," as the son of Jesse had been formerly (1 Sam. 18:5); — "seeking the welfare of his people," as (the true) David, the Anointed will seek the welfare of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:9), or as the Lord will think to do good to the house of Judah (Zech. 8:15); — "speaking peace to all his seed." Thus this book closes at the moment when the reign of peace begins. All this people, formerly oppressed, are recognized as the race (or seed) of Mordecai. What an ending! Thus this expression is realized in a measure: "On earth peace, good pleasure in men!"

Summary

Let us briefly summarize the contents of this book, as well as the character of the major personality.

In a time when God still hides His face from His people, the wife from among the nations is repudiated, and the virgin daughter of Israel takes her place in the affections of the Sovereign. Still hidden, as far as her origin is concerned, she becomes his wife and thus becomes queen of the nations. The adversary raises up a great tribulation against the people, but he is defeated by the liberator of Israel who takes possession of all his goods, and he undergoes the fortune which he himself had prepared to the object of his hatred. The Jewish wife is recognized publicly as such. The enemies of the people are the objects of the vengeance which those same enemies had desired to wreak against them. The administration of the kingdom is confided to the one who had been the servant of all, and who at last inaugurates the reign of righteousness, peace, and joy.

In this book, Mordecai especially attracts our attention. We can distinguish two orders of qualities in him: his moral character and his official character.

His moral character, a precious portrayal of the character of the Savior, strikes us with his tenderness, his delicate sensibilities,

his family affections, and his constant care for an orphaned daughter. But he is just as remarkable on account of his righteousness and uprightness, his courage and his decision, as well as his unshakable attachment to the word of God. Taking the place of the remnant of Israel, he accepts bondage — he who would be declared great in the presence of one and all. Nevertheless, he refuses to bow his head to the adversary: he resists the enemy at the expense of his own life. He associates himself with the distress of his people and suffers it in his own soul, but he is patient in hope, and that is the triumph of faith when the enemy is all powerful and God hides His face.

His official character is just as remarkable. He keeps watch at the king's gate and thus he becomes the Savior of the nations. He is recognized as such, at the moment when the satanic adversary is cast down. He is the Savior of his people and, as administrator of the kingdom, he himself bears the attributes of royalty and wears the great crown. He makes himself to be feared through judgment. He exercises vengeance, but as a prelude to rest, and he reigns in righteousness. He presides over the joy and happiness which he has obtained for his seed. He

orders everything, in company with the Jewish wife, his adopted daughter, who reigns over the nations and shares his interest for his peoples. He becomes the Prince of the kings of the earth, accepted by God and his brothers, great, and, in his royal character, doing everything in view of the welfare of his people — and finally, he introduces the reign of peace.

In the book of Esther, the Spirit of God desires to attach our affections above all to Himself — to Christ.