

PREFACE

Claude Duvernoy, 1976

Let's call a spade a spade and be faithful to the truth, without fear. Several friends and colleagues have cautioned us against possible misunderstandings over the title of this book: *The Zionism of God*. They have urged us to choose a less politically-loaded term.¹ We searched a long time, in vain, for an adequate alternative to express what this book is about. So permit us to define the term "Zionism" in relation to the state of Israel as well as to the chapter title "The Zionist Vision of Jesus."

This book is about Zion, both the hill and city cherished in Jewish, Christian and Muslim tradition; a place to which Abraham, David, the prophets, Christ and the (Jewish) birth of the Church are mysteriously and historically connected; as is Mohamed.

The book deals with the resurrection of that hill and city, pounded so often in bloody and fiery battles by conquerors and tyrants of centuries past. It deals with their significance in history and now in this troubled 20th century.

The book has to do with God's promises, long ago, to his "friend" Abraham, promises renewed to Abraham's offspring, and especially to his grandson, the "wrestler" who for the first time in history received that mysterious name, Israel.

We like to think that until the appearance of Christ and the Church, the Jewish people played the role, as it were, of Ambassador of God. They were chosen among the nations to make known God's love and God's will to all mankind. At times, they were not worthy of that unique and onerous task, but ever the beloved ambassador, its commission was never revoked. As for the unique manual of Holy History² we know as the Bible, Zion on its holy hill is the heart of the story, along with its prophetic and messianic significance regarding the salvation of the nations.

And so the people of Israel were an in-the-flesh sign to the world of the sovereignty the Creator exercises on history. It is through this fragile channel, one of the "weak and foolish" things the apostle Paul talks about, that God was pleased to manifest his glory and power. It is through this channel that He confronted tyrants and potentates of the world who imagined they were the ones controlling history, and yet the grave waited for them all.

It was in Jerusalem where for centuries "the politics of God's salvation"—to use the expression—was shaped, not just for Israel but for all the nations. Zion was the headquarters where the charismatic strategy of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob-Israel was worked out. In this sense the Patriarchs, and later all their children who remained passionately attached to Jerusalem, were Zionists. Also, Psalm 137, poignantly crying out to all the children of Abraham If I forget you, O Jerusalem, May my right hand forget her skill is eminently a Zionist psalm, as are all the Psalms of Ascent, the pilgrimages to Jerusalem, where we foresee the desert blossom again and the children of Israel return from the four corners of the earth, as "torrents in the Negev"...

This book is also about the coming of Christ and the emergence of the Church. Does this mean God's promises to Israel are now annulled and emptied of their prophetic meaning for our time?

This book is about the Word of God. Are we willing to recognize its

¹ [The title of the version, now out of print, is "Controversy of Zion." Ed.]

² "Holy" does not mean "perfect" but "set aside" (to serve God). There is a history "set aside" also: the history of the Jewish people.

eternal and unchangeable value for today's modern Israel? Are we prepared to take this Word seriously, or would we prefer to see it surgically dissected by any and every school of textual criticism?...

If the promises of God are truly "forever" as the Hebrew Bible and the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans affirm and if, truly, among other gifts of grace, the alliances and the promises still belong to Israel first of all, then God "has not rejected His people" and Zion still has prophetic and messianic validity for this people.

This book is about recognizing that those tens of thousands of "Zionists" returning from Babylon in the time of Cyrus were but a slight foreshadowing of the ultimate return. Only some of the members of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi found their way back to Zion. They came, not from the four corners of the earth, but from Babylon. Nor did they come to the Promised Land to settle "forever."³

The Church has lost, to some extent, the biblical meaning of history. In other words, "she has forgotten Jerusalem." That explains, without a doubt, why her right hand—her hope—has withered significantly.

Christ himself outlines, mainly in the synoptic Gospels, his own view of history, in harmony with the visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah. We call this vision Zionist, not because it might provide, for instance, water for the electoral mill of some Israeli politician, but because it all points to Jerusalem "in those days and at that time..."

To be explicit, Christ uses a key expression, *plêrôma tôn-ethnôn* "the end of the times of the nations." The Apostle Paul in the eleventh chapter of his letter to the Romans reiterates it.. Unfortunately, this expression is not properly translated in the various versions of the Bible. Both Christ and Paul link this event to the physical and spiritual reappearance of Zion, of Jerusalem, and the land of Israel.

That's why we say this vision of history remains a Zionist vision. Here then is what this book, written in Jerusalem and "aging" these last twelve years, seeks to bring to the attention of the Church.

We are well aware that we are only one of the many nameless instruments of the Lord of history. We want, therefore, to mention names that come to mind of some of the great Jews whose knowledge of Scripture and whose personal talents are exemplary: Martin Buber, Joseph Klausner, David Ben-Gurion, Isaac Ben-Zvi, Albert Einstein, Theodore Herzl, Haim Weizmann, André Neher, André Chouraqui, Josué Jehouda, Eliezer Ben-Jehouda, Edmond Fleg, Shalom Asch, Marc Chagall, and Arthur Rubinstein. May the Church learn from all these Zionist greats including scholars, visionaries, men of action and poets, for God is able to speak to them also, guide them and make witnesses of them.

Jews coming to Israel with names such as these make the country look much like a laboratory experiment. It is the first time in Israel's history that its "children" are gathering together from the four corners of the earth. They bring their languages, customs, cultures and worldviews—and their multiple problems. Living close to Zion, watching a desert beginning to blossom again, conversing in Hebrew, a lively language that comes out of the old Bible of their fathers, they are taking on a formidable task: creating a new humanity, a new society. And, for sure, it's no accident that this people, so long forbidden possession of land by the laws of the Church and government, now in our time, is teaching us what it means to live in community, a community surprisingly similar to that of the ancient Essenes.

But this people struggles and lives surrounded by enemies who once again have sworn to destroy them. In 1948, when Israel was attacked, even before it was officially born, and in violation of decisions made by the United Nations, no voice within Christianity arose against the bombardment of Jerusalem...nor during the twenty years of scandalous division of this

³ Read the end of the book of the prophet Amos as proof.

city...the City of Peace.

The Vatican, to this day, has not recognized the existence of the State of Israel. The World Council of Churches in Geneva refrains from any gesture, any declaration that could be interpreted in favor of the nation of Israel.

Yet if there is any land, any city that should be particularly close to the heart of the Church, should it not be the resurrected Holy Land and Zion?

If the Church does not pray and act in favor of peace and the reconciliation of Jerusalem, who will do it? What will the Master say to the Church when He returns?

If there is any "motherland" where all Christians can and must meet as brothers, is it not Jerusalem, their common birth place?

Consider the following points:

The State of Israel was born of the sacrifice of six million Jews slaughtered by the Nazi regime.

The infamous yellow star is a creation of the Lateran Council of 1215 (not of Hitler).

Both Christ and Paul alerted us to the time when the olive tree will start to sprout. At "the end time of the nations," Zion will reappear and will burst into bloom.

Is it not time for the Church to follow the footsteps of the Father who went forth to meet the prodigal son, having suffered so much? Should the Church not act accordingly with joy and in faith?

Zionist theology? It declares, in its totality, the grace of God in favor of the chosen people.

Theology of History? Its mysterious center is Jerusalem for the healing of the nations.

Theology of the Incarnation? It leads to the final triumph of the incarnation itself. ♦