

FOREWORD

By Dr. David Flusser

"The Zionism of God"¹ seems to me a highly important work, in particular for the non-Jewish reader. It has repeatedly been said that there can be no free dialogue between Christians and Jews unless the Christians understand how the Jew himself experiences his Judaism.

The author makes it very clear that the idea of the Jewish people's return to the Holy Land has always been at the heart of authentic Jewish thought. It should be kept in mind that the majority of contemporary Jews, throughout the world, have linked their fate to that of Zion with stronger bonds than ever before since the destruction of the Temple. For the Return is no longer an eschatological dream, but historical reality.

The brilliant pages in Claude Duvernoy's book devoted to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament alike show that the idea of Return is a central motif of the biblical writings. Today these texts speak for themselves, but let us not forget that for centuries Christian theological tradition used to regard these prophecies as religious utterances which had become invalid in the wake of the appearance of Jesus. This tradition still has its adherents, but is becoming increasingly indefensible.

Isn't it, indeed, a conspicuous fact that this new approach to the Bible (characterized by its respect for the received text) coincides with the resurrection of the Jewish people in its Land?

The author stresses that the Return to Zion was already announced by the prophets of the First Temple period, and that this "Zionist" hope was not extinguished after the Babylonian but, on the contrary, was very much alive during the inter-testamental era, as is attested by the following fragments from the 13th chapter of the Book of Tobit:

And He will scourge us for our iniquities, and will have mercy again, and will gather us out of all nations, among whom He has scattered us... O Jerusalem, the Holy City, He will scourge thee for thy children's work, and will have mercy again on the sons of the righteous. Give praise to the Lord, for He is good; and praise the everlasting King, that His tabernacle may be builded again with joy, and let Him make joyful there in thee those that are captive, and love in thee for ever those that are miserable.

Many nations shall come from far to the name of the Lord God with gifts in their hands, even gifts to the King of Heaven; all generations shall praise thee with great joy, and the name of Jerusalem shall be exalted for ever and ever...

We see that the hope of Return is an indissoluble part of the universalist message in the wisdom literature and the prophetic writings alike. It is well known by which mortal dangers Israel and Judaism were threatened under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, but not many are aware of the real nature of the Maccabean expectations. It may therefore be useful to quote a fragment from the Second Book of Maccabees, where Judah addresses the Jews of Egypt in the following words:

Whereas we then are about to celebrate the Purification of the temple, we have written unto you, and ye shall do well, if ye keep the same days. We hope also that the God, who delivered all his people, and gave them all a heritage, and the kingdom, and the priesthood, and the sanctuary, as He promised in the Torah will shortly have mercy upon us, and gather us together out of every land under heaven into the Holy Land: for He hath delivered us out of great troubles, and hath purified the Temple.

(2:16-18)

In addition to these fragments from the Book of Tobit and the second Book of Maccabees (which are both included in the canon of the Catholic

¹ This title corresponds to the original French title of Duvernoy's book. It was substituted in the print edition of the English translation of 1986 by 'Controversy of Zion.'

Church), we follow the example of the author of this book and quote from the words of Jesus as well, to show that his hopes were the same as those of the fathers: that God will one day gather the Jews together *from their dispersion among the nations*:

And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and the south, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God."

(Luke 13:29)

The author also calls attention to Jesus' prophecy, likewise mentioned by Luke (21:24), concerning the fulfillment of "the times of the Gentiles," when Jerusalem will be returned to the heritage of Israel.

With Albert Schweitzer and the author of this book we are convinced that Jesus' eschatological expectations were exactly those of the biblical prophets.

Without dwelling at length on the arguments and elaborations of Claude Duvernoy, I wish to emphasize that every theologian should comprehend that nothing in the New Testament contradicts the Divine promises to Israel in the Hebrew Bible. To be sure, no man knows "of that day and that hour."

Let us be grateful to the author, himself a Christian theologian, for having so passionately and rightfully elucidated that the recent developments in the Middle East affirm the faith and hope of Israel. Let us hope that the beliefs and expectations of the Christians be equally fortified by them, for all that unfolds before our eyes is no less in conformity with the prophetic message of the New Testament.

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