

Christians and Israel

A problem of conscience is posed to the Christians today because of the actual State of Israel. Most of them, feeling a sense of guilt after the so called "Hitlerian holocaust", hurried to recognize it, while the others refuse to do so for two reasons:

- 1) Because they are shocked by the injustice done to the Palestinian people, who have been chassed out from their Homeland by violence, or crushed in there by the Israelis.
- 2) For reasons related to the Christians' faith in Jesus and to the testimony due to Him.

The subject of this study being a delicate one, capable of suscitating reactions, it must be said beforehand, that it is not in an antisemitic spirit that the problem is treated. We feel urged by compassion for social and religious justice.

We strive for the religious liberty of everyone and everywhere, even in Israel where we hope that the millions of Palestinians - Christians and Moslems - will be allowed to return back by the Israeli authorities, who refuse to reintigrate them **because they are not Jews**. Is this not a racist attitude?

To clarify the problem, we must ask ourselves the following question: For a Christian, what does the recognition of Israel mean? Is it to recognize the "fait accompli" of its presence in Palestine, or the legitimacy of this presence there today?

As for the "fait accompli", which is a historical fact, one cannot but notice the presence in Palestine of a political entity that the United-Nations — since 1948 only - agreed to recognize as the "State of Israel".

But what about the legitimacy of this presence on the Palestinian territory? To be clear: A man detains a stolen object; we recognize the fact that this object is in his possession, but can we approve of the fact by recognizing the legitimacy of this possession, without committing a serious injustice?

Thus, the problem of conscience which presents itself to the Christians today is the following: Can they admit of the legitimacy of the State of Israel in Palestine?

When we speak about the legitimacy of a State, we refer to a historical right on a given land; in the sole case of Israel, a Biblical right is evoked. We must therefore speak of the historical and Biblical legitimacy of Israel.

I The historical legitimacy

One can find no historical argument that is sufficiently valid to justify an Israeli State in Palestine in the XXth. century, this land belonging to its Palestinian citizens as any other country belongs to its own. Millions of Palestinians claim their legitimate historical right over the Palestinian soil. These rights are pre-Biblical, and the Bible mentions Palestine and the Palestinians. Their wars against the Jewish invaders are notorious (1 Samuel 28).

Before Jesus, the Jews often attempted to form an Israeli State in Palestine to the detriment of the Palestinians. This State took the shape of a kingdom around 1.000 B.C. But after less than one century, the kingdom split into two: the kingdom of the North in Samaria, and the kingdom of the South in Judea. Both kingdoms disappeared: the first in 722 B.C, two hundred years after

its formation, swept by the Assyrians, and the second in 586 B.C., about four hundred years after its formation, when the Babylonian invasion put an end to it. The Jews were then exiled to Babylone.

After five centuries, in 37 B.C, a Jewish kingdom reappeared with Herod the Great. Again an end was put to it after only one century, in 70 A.D, by the Roman troops of Titus. The Jews then escaped from Palestine to the four quarters of the world, while the original Palestinian inhabitants remained there.

Two thousand years later, in 1948, a State of Israel reappeared in Palestine, claiming rights on the land, to the detriment of the Palestinians who always had lived there. The Jews who rushed into the Holy Land from the four quarters of the earth, chased out the Palestinians by military violence. These had to leave their homes in tragical conditions to be exiled under tents in the neighbouring Arab countries.

The great international powers helped the Jewish immigration in Palestine, while the Palestinians were forced out of it.

The Israeli State was finally proclaimed on the 14th of May 1948. A quarter of an hour after its proclamation, it was recognized by the great powers as if Palestine and the Palestinians never existed.

Yet the historical proofs of their existence are obvious and abundant. (Biblical: Numbers 13, 21-33 etc..., social, cultural, folkloric, old and contemporary Palestinian money etc ...).

We notice that those who back up Israel feel a certain guilty conscience towards the Jews; in order to clear their conscience they voted for a Jewish State in Palestine. But justice cannot be done by depriving the Palestinians from their legitimate rights in favour of others. No one can dispose of what belongs to someone else. To speak clearly, an American, a British or a French man for example, does not have the right to dispose of the Palestinian earth that does not belong to him.

A question is asked to those who want to satisfy their conscience by placing the Jews in a Jewish homeland: Why not give them a part of their own American or European land of which they can dispose?

The usual answer is to evoke a Biblical legitimacy: according to them, the Israelis have a Biblical right on Palestine. Thus we are transferred from a historical ground to a Biblical one, and most of the times by persons who ignore the Bible.

Therefore, Christians are asked, as such, to recognize Biblical rights to the Zionist State on Palestine. Today, the people of Jesus Christ are urged on to testify in favour of those who deny that Jesus is the Christ, and expect another Christ. This is the problem of conscience. This is the test of the end of times predicted by Jesus (Revelation 3,10). The Vatican itself failed in this test! (Please see our text: "The Universal Trial").

For Judaism is neither a race nor a geographical land, but a religion which finds its perfect achievement in Jesus Christ. From the Christian point of view, to recognize a Jewish State for Jews, is as absurd as to recognize a Christian State for the Christians. A Jewish **community** is one thing, a Jewish **nation** is altogether another thing.

II The Biblical legitimacy

Many Christians support Israel because, as strange as it may seem, they think that they are helping God's chosen people to return back to their Promised Land. If Jews are God's chosen people, who are the followers of Jesus?! We therefore find it important to remind the Christians who is God's people and what is the Promised Land at the light of the Gospel.

A. The Promised Land

Palestine is not a land promised by God to the Israelis for two main reasons:

- 1) The Promised Land is the symbol of a spiritual, non geographical reality.
- 2) The promise was under condition.

1. The Promised Land is spiritual

God had promised a land to Abraham and his posterity; but this land, as intended by God, was explained all through the centuries by the Bible, to appear finally as a spiritual reality, not a geographical place. In fact, St. Paul said: "By faith Abraham sejournd in the promised land as in a **strange country**, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked forward for a well founded City whose builder is God" (Hebr 11,9-10).

The spirituality of the land has its roots in the Old Testament. Thus the tribe of Levi was not to have a share of the Palestinian earth, God being their share: "Unto the tribe of Levi, Moses gave no inheritance: the **Lord God** of Israel was their **inheritance**" (Josh 13,33).

Again the Psalm (37,11) says: "the meek and the righteous inherit the Earth"; we cannot say that all the Israelis who live today in Palestine are meek and righteous. Moreover, we can find these virtues anywhere among non-Jews. Jesus repeated this teaching: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth" (Mat 5,5). He explained this Earth by saying that the Kingdom of God is not a visible or political entity, but that it dwells **within the believer's heart**. Indeed, When the Pharisees asked him when was the Kingdom of God to come, He knew that they meant the universal political Zionist empire. He answered: "The Kingdom of God does not come in an observable manner: no one can say: 'Look, here it is!' or 'Look, there it is!' For the Kingdom of God is **within you**" (Luke 17,20-21). This confirms Jeremiah's prophecy about the New Covenant dwelling **within** the believers' hearts, as explained further.

We find in modern Judaism many rabbis who underlign the spiritual dimension of the Promised Land. The following commentary of the great rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz is typical: "It is written: 'And you shall live in the land that I gave to your fathers' (Ezek 36,28). The Lord had promised Abraham to give him the land of Canaan; but when Sarah died, he did not possess a land to bury her. How, then, was the Promise accomplished? There are two lands which bear the name of Israel: the Land of Israel of Above, and the land of Israel of below. The Holy Land is the Heavenly Land, where the Divine Palace is, from which overflow the springs of Wisdom. It is this **spiritual Land** that has been promised and given to our fathers, and not the geographical earth" ("Le Royaume de Dieu et le royaume de César", by the rabbi Emmanuel Levyne, editions of "Le Reveil", Beyrouth).

As we shall see further, the seed of Abraham, the heirs of the Promised Land, are also the members of a **spiritual descendance**; they are not established according to a historical flesh and blood genealogy. This spiritual legacy is not of the father-son type, but depends upon the faith in Jesus as the Messiah. St Paul said: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the Promise" (Gal. 3,29).

Thus for a Christian, the Jews who refuse to recognize that Jesus is the true Christ, and explicitly await another Messiah, are not the seed of Abraham, nor the heirs of the Promised Land, whether it is spiritual or geographical.

2. The promise was under condition

God disinherited the Jews even before the advent of Jesus because:

- a. The Land had been promised **under condition** of faithfulness to the Covenant.
- b. The conditions have not been fulfilled, and the Covenant was thus broken by the Jews.
- c. God then announced the advent of a New Covenant — established by Jesus - which the Jews still refuse.

a) The condition:

Supposing that the land is geographical, we must not forget that it has been promised under certain conditions, because Moses told the Jews:

"If you do not keep and observe all the words of this Law... then the Lord will strike you down with monstrous plagues, **you and your descendants**... For not having obeyed to the Voice of your God, the Lord your God will rejoice in ruining you and destroying you and you **will be plucked off from the land** which you are about to enter..." (Deuteronomy 28,58-64).

The word **"if"** obviously reveals the condition, and that, in case of infidelity, the outcome of the Promise is totally opposite to the Jews and their descendants: what was promised were plagues and **expulsion** from the land. These were the very words of the Covenant.

b) The betrayal: the Covenant broken off:

The Jews did not "observe all the words of this Law" as Moses had asked them to do. The Bible explicitly reveals that they betrayed God by worshipping the idols of the neighbouring countries. They practiced their pagan customs and even offered their children in sacrifice to these idols (1 Kings 16,30-34/ Jeremiah 7,30-32). The Psalm 106 states the various Israeli infidelities: "They worshipped a calf in Horeb...They forgot God their Saviour... They joined themselves unto Baal and imitated the heathen, and served their idols. They sacrificed their own sons and daughters to the devils..."

This is why the prophets cried out, denounced the betrayal and declared God's anger against Israel: "Hear this, you princes of the house of Israel, you who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity and say: 'Is not the Lord among us?' Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, Jerusalem a heap of rubble and the Temple Mount a wooded height" (Micah 3, 9-12).

Isaiah also prophesied against Israel saying, in God's Name: "I have nourished and brought up children, says the Lord, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib: but Israel does not know... Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers... they have forsaken the Lord" (Isaiah 1, 2-4).

c) Abrogation and New Covenant.

After having denounced Israel's betrayal, God spoke by Jeremiah to declare that the Covenant had been abrogated by the Jews, and to announce the coming of a New Covenant, not like the abrogated one, since the believer's share will be God Himself, not a land: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, in which I shall make a **New Covenant** with the House of Israel, **but not**

like the Covenant that I made with their fathers... a Covenant which **theybroke**... But this shall be the Covenant that I shall make with the House of Israel: I shall put my Law **within them**, and write it **in their hearts**; Then I shall be their God and they will be my people" (Jer 31, 31-33).

It is obvious that this New Covenant differs from the abrogated one since it will "not be like it". The difference lies in the fact that the New Covenant is spiritual, **within the hearts** of the believers and it promises no geographical land to the Jews, or to any other people, but it is God Himself who becomes the share of any man who believes in Jesus, the Founder of the New and Universal Covenant.

The Jews still refuse Jesus Christ's Covenant because it promises no geographical land, nor does it grant them the privilege of establishing the worldwide Zionist empire they wish to have.

B. The Chosen People

God's choice never fell upon a Jewish nation as some still think. In fact, the Bible says that God chose a man, Abraham, who is Syrian, and not a Jewish people, for there were no Jews before Abraham. It is therefore wrong to believe that Judaism is a race; Moses stresses upon this point by telling the Jews: "You will speak and say before the Lord your God: 'My father (Abraham) was a wandering **Aramaean** (Syrian)' " (Deut. 26, 5). Whether they admit it or not, the truth is written in the Bible: The Jews are of Syrian origin.

The purpose of Abraham's call was not political; God never intended to found a new nation or set up still another political State in the world. God's intention was to form a spiritual community from which He will send the Messiah, the Saviour of all men. But this community had changed itself into a political nation and when the Messiah came they did not have the Spirit to recognize Him: "He came to his own people and his own people did not accept Him. But to those who did accept Him, He gave the power to become the children of God" (John 1,11-12). According to the Bible, therefore, God's people is international and based on the faith in Jesus.

Jesus told the Jews: "If you do not believe that I am He (the Christ) you will die in your sins... (John 8,24)...If God were your Father, you would love me. You are from your father, the devil, and you want to do what your father wants. He is a murderer from the start...(John 8,42-44)".

What do the so-called Christians tell them today?...In the synagogue of Rome, the Pope John-Paul II told them: "You are our elder brothers". How can a disciple of Jesus be the benjamin brother of the one who rejects Jesus and denies that He is the Messiah? St John said: "If anyone comes to you bringing a different doctrine, you must not receive him into your house or even give him a greeting. Whoever greets him takes part in his wicked actions" (2 John 10-11). The mentioned Pope not only greeted him, but considered him as his "elder brother"!!

According to the Gospel, the true Jews are the disciples of Jesus. Does not Christ call the Jews who reject Him "false Jews, and a synagogue of Satan?" (Rev 2,9/ 3,9).

This is why St Paul said that Abraham's seed are the disciples of Jesus Christ: "If you belong to Jesus Christ than you are of Abraham's descendance and heirs to the Promise"(Gal 3,29). He therefore invites the Jews "not to persevere in their unbelief in order to be grafted in (God's people) by believing in Jesus" (Rom 11,23).

It is then out of question to reject the Jews as persons, but Israel as a State. The Jews are, on the contrary, invited to enter into the flock of Jesus to become part of the universal people of God.

True love forbids us to drown them into their own errors by encouraging them to think that they are God's people back to the Promised Land.

For we must understand that the Jews, who keep on denying that Jesus is the Christ, bear the specific characteristic of the Antichrist announced by St John: "Who is the liar if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is the Antichrist" (1 John 2,22).

All Christians and all Moslems recognize that Jesus is the Christ. We even find followers of Jesus in Buddhism and Hinduism. Gandhi often spoke of his admiration towards Him and of his disappointment towards Christians: " Give me Jesus Christ, and keep the Christians for yourselves", he said.

John's prophecy about the Antichrist cannot be applied to those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, but to those who refuse to admit that He is the Christ. The Antichrist's specific characteristic can only be applied to the Jews who explicitly deny Jesus and expect another Christ. This is the Antichrist.

We must not be astonished about this radical change in the fate of the Jews who refuse Jesus, and let us remember what Jesus said when a Roman officer expressed his faith in Him: "In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from the East and from the West, and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the children of the kingdom (of Israel) will be thrown out into the darkness where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth" (Mat 8,10-12).

The opposition between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Israel is obvious in Christ's words where He condemns the sons of the Zionist kingdom to "be thrown out into the darkness" (Mat 8,11). This opposition between the two kingdoms is the main conflict between Jesus and the Jews.

Thus, with the advent of Jesus, the concept of the "chosen people" changed from a tribal and fanatic one, into a spiritual and international reality. In the above text, Christ condemns the "children of the kingdom" of Israel because they want to understand Judaism in a political and racial manner. In fact, Jesus told them "your father is the devil!" (John 8,44). Those who have the devil as father cannot be the "elder brothers" of the ones who have Jesus as Father!

This is the reason why Jesus refused to be the king of a political Jewish State: "My Kingdom is not of this world", He said. (Please refer to our text: "The Tragedy of Jesus")

In fact, St John tells us that, after the miracle of the multiplication of the bread, "Jesus, as He realised that the Jews were about to come and take Him **by force** to make Him king, He fled back into the mountain all alone" (John 6,15).

One of the aspects of the conflict, is the universality of the Kingdom of God; for Jesus, the universality means the introduction into the Kingdom of God of all those who believe in Him, whatever their race and language. But for the Zionist Jews, the Kingdom belongs exclusively to the Jews of the world (international Jews).

Yet the prophets had already extended the Divine election to the people of all races. God, speaking by Isaiah VIII centuries B.C, said: "I will gather all nations and tongues.... and I shall also take of them for priests and for Levites" (Isaiah 66, 18-21).

This choice of religious ministres amongst non Jewish nations is an undeniable proof of the authenticity of Jesus Christ's universal priesthood.

What should we then conclude?.

St Paul answers: "What then? Israel has not obtained what he seeks for, but the election has obtained" (Rom 11,7).

The election being the disciples of Jesus, of all races and languages.

III) Israel : a sign of the times.

Since the Jews who are gathered today in Palestine from the four quarters of the earth are not God's people back to their promised land, what then is the prophetic meaning of the return of an Israeli State?

It is a "sign of times".

In religious circles, it is often spoken of the "signs of the times" without precisising what are the times ment by this expression: It means "the sign **of the end of times**".

Speaking of these times, Jesus said: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles (pagans), until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21, 24). The times in question are, therefore, the end of the times of the Gentiles, or, in other words, the end of the pagans. Israel is therefore a sign of the end of the time allowed to the pagans.

After the advent of Jesus, the pagans become those who deny that He is the Christ; this denial makes of them the symbol of paganism in its various aspects: THE Antichrist by excellence.

When the Jews ordered the apostles not to speak about Jesus, the apostles prayed to God saying: "In this city (Jerusalem), Herod and Pontius Pilate plotted together with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel **against** your holy Servant, Jesus, whom You anointed..." (Acts 4, 27).

The word "against" reveals the spirit of the **Anti**-Christ that dwells in the people of Israel. (Please see our text "The Antichrist Yesterday and Today").

The Jews want us to believe that Israel's return is a great sign, and an accomplishment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. But we know that the prophecies that they evoke speak of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile in the VIth Century B.C. Let us not be deceived.

For now is rather the time to understand the prophecies of the **New Testament** concerning the end of the pagans' times, before the return of Jesus. We shall thus discover who these pagans are. For this is the end of the Zionist times.

Jesus said that in these times "the abomination of the desolation shall be in the Holy Places (Jerusalem)" (Mat 24,15). On the other hand, the book of St John's Revelation speaks about the reappearance of the Antichrist (Rev 17,8). This will happen in the "Holy Places", or the Holy Land, Palestine, and particularly in the "Beloved City" (Jerusalem), where, according to the Revelation, it is Satan, not God, who gathers the subjects of the Antichrist, from the four quarters of the world for war, not for peace (Rev 20, 7-9). (Please see our text "The Key of the Apocalypse").

IV) The attitude of a true Christi

Finally, what must be the attitude of a Christian towards the actual State of Israel?.

The moment has come to meditate, in order to put into practice, these words addressed by the book of Revelation to those who still want to be witnesses of Jesus: "You must prophesy AGAIN against many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (Rev 10,11).

If the Lord, in our Apocalyptical times, has sent an order to his apostles, asking them to prophesy **again** against his enemies, it is because most of the apostles are deceived by the Antichrist, whom they do not recognize. Instead of denouncing him, they establish good relations with him. The book of Revelation, therefore, reminds them of their duty as apostles and witnesses of Jesus: after having kept silent, they must now **again** bear witness and speak against Christ's enemy: Israel.

When the Christ came, He was not received by his own people (the Jews: John 1,11). His own people (the Christians), today, welcome the Antichrist...

No Christian can recognize the legitimacy of an Israeli State in Palestine without denying himself as a Christian; for by doing so, he implicitly admits that the Christians are not the prophetic Israel, and that Jesus is not the Christ.

Jesus said: " No man can serve two masters." Nobody can serve the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of Israel at the same time. We cannot safeguard our testimony to Jesus Christ's authentic Messianism without denouncing Israel's false messianism. The Jews know it, but the Christians are unaware of it.

In such an important matter, silence or neutrality are a sign of treason and of lukewarmness: Jesus said: "I am aware of your activities :You are neither cold nor hot: I wish you were cold or hot. But since you are only lukewarm I shall spit you out of my mouth" (Rev 3,15).

A choice must, therefore, be made, and we shall be judged according to our commitment: it is not by recognizing Israel that a Christian remains faithful to his testimony, but by inviting the Jews to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah.