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"THE MEANING OF ISRAEL· A JEWISH VIEW"  
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The dominant reality in Jewish life today is that the Jewish people throughout the world have experienced a profound transformation since the six-day war between Israel and the Arab states in June 1967. No one can truly understand Jews or Judaism today - nor can Jewish-Christian relationships be accurately comprehended - unless one takes into account the magnitude and depth of this transformation, which verges on collective metanoia.

The threat of Arab leaders, broadcast daily over Radio Cairo, Radio Amman, and from Damascus during the weeks before the June 1967 war, to annihilate the two-and-a-half million Jews in Israel, were answered by a Jewish unity, Jewish solidarity, and a consciousness of interdependence in fate and destiny, for which I can find no precedent in the past two thousand years of Jewish history.

I can best illustrate the truth of this assertion with a personal experience. During the last week of May 1967, just a few days before the Israel-Arab hostilities broke out, I was called hurriedly to attend a meeting of Jewish leaders in New York City. Leaders of some 23 major Jewish bodies, representatives of all branches of Jewish life--Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Zionist, non-Zionist, secular, labor, social welfare, Jewish education--listened to a report by a young Israeli who had flown in from Jerusalem the day before. Like the few Jews who escaped from Hungary and Poland during the Nazi occupation and rushed to Paris and London to awaken the conscience of the world to what was happening to the

six million Jews in Europe, this young Israeli was driven on his mission of mercy, repeating the ancient Yiddish cry, "Rateveh!" - "Help! Save us!"

He placed a tape-recorder before this group of Jewish leaders and played off Arab-language broadcasts monitored a few days before, and translated them into English:

The Voice of the Arabs, Radio Cairo

"Destroy them and lay them waste and liberate Palestine. Your hour has come. Woe to you Israel. The Arab nation has come to wipe out your people and to settle the account. This is your end, Israel. All the Arabs must take revenge for 1948. This is a moment of historic importance to our Arab people and to the holy war. Conquer the land."

Another tape carried a broadcast by the Syrian Defense Minister

"We say. We shall never call for, nor accept, peace. We shall only accept war and the restoration of the usurped land. We resolve to drench this land with our blood, to oust you, aggressors, and throw you into the sea for good."

Then the young Israeli showed us photostatic copies of captured battle orders of the Egyptian army and air force, the Syrian and the Jordanian armies. Jordan, the "moderate" among the Arab states, issued operational orders to seven brigade headquarters instructing them to wipe out the civilian inhabitants of Israeli population centers. These orders discovered at Ramallah headquarters north of Jerusalem, stated

"The intention of H.Q. Western Front is to carry out a raid on Motza colony (an Israeli village of some 800 people three miles west of Jerusalem), to destroy it, and kill all its inhabitants..." (1)

Had the Egyptians, Syrians, and Jordanians struck first, carrying out their battle orders, it is estimated that 250,000 to 500,000 Jewish men, women and children would have been murdered in the first hours of war.

As those Jewish leaders listened, one suddenly felt something extraordinary happening in the crowded room. All the man-made distinctions that had separated one Jew from another seemed visibly to evaporate. At that moment they no longer saw themselves as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, religious or secular, Zionist or non-Zionist. There was one emotion: we were all Jews, all conscious of our being one people, all overwhelmingly convinced of our responsibility to each other.

That transformation did not occur only in the Jewish leadership. It reached into virtually every Jewish heart around the world. The reality and intensity of that "new Jewish being" manifested itself in myriad ways. Five leaders of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, now aware that ideological anti-Zionism was a betrayal of their people at a moment when Arabs were publicly proposing a "final solution" in Israel, resigned from the organization and made substantial contributions to the United Jewish Appeal's Emergency Campaign Fund for Israel. A Jewish taxi-driver stopped in front of the Jewish Agency building in New York City, opened his doors, pointed to his two teen-age sons in the cab, and said to an Agency official, "Here are my two sons. They are all I have in the world. Take them. Let them go to Israel and milk cows, tend the fields, so they can relieve others to go to the battlefields. Our people need help."

It is not hyperbole, in my judgment, to say that this consciousness of Jewish unity and solidarity as a people, of a common fate and destiny across all national and linguistic barriers, is surpassed only by the moment in Jewish history when Moses brought the tribes together at the foot of Mount Sinai where they were transformed through the Covenant into an historic people charged with the task of helping to bring redemption to the world.

How does one explain this phenomenon?

Two decisive events in contemporary Jewish experience must be taken into account in any effort to understand the interior life of the Jew today. The first is the Nazi holocaust. The other is the meaning of the State of Israel to the Jewish people and to Judaism.

## I - THE HOLOCAUST

Discussion of the Nazi holocaust must be approached as one confronts the sacred--with fear and awe. Less than 25 years ago our people suffered an unbearable trauma, from whose shattering effects we have yet to recover. In his recent book, The Legends of Our Time, Elie Wiesel, who survived three concentration camps and has become an emissary to keep alive the hallowed memory of the six million Jewish victims, described his conversation with a distinguished literary critic: "I asked Alfred Kazin one day if he thought the death of six million Jews could have meaning, and he replied he hoped not." Wiesel adds: "All of us, I believe, in varying degrees must take responsibility for what happened in Europe...We belong to a generation at once lost and guilty, and our collective conscience lies under a weight of humiliation." (2)

A clue to the depth of disorientation among Jews all over the world after the genocide experience can be found in the remarkable debate over Rolf Hochhuth's play, The Deputy. That play which, in my judgment, was a Lutheran Reformation morality drama in which Jews as persons were practically incidental, depicted Pope Pius XII as the opposite number to Hitler, implying that the Pope had the power to stop the Nazi juggernaut just by speaking out.

I believe firmly that the Pope, by his self-definition as the vicar of Christ on earth, had no moral alternative but to make his voice heard, clearly and decisively, in protest against the murderous evil of the Nazis. As Gordon Zahn, the Catholic sociologist, has demonstrated in his study, German Catholics and Hitler's Wars (3) the absence of clearcut moral leadership on resistance to collaboration with Hitler's war machine and murder-factories either from Rome or the German bishops at Fulda reinforced a mentality among German masses to conform to Nazi demands.

Nevertheless, Hochhuth and the adapters of his play are still responsible for gross oversimplification of the complex political, economic, and social factors that were operating behind the Nazi dynamic and the stand of Pius XII.

As incredible as his simplistic thesis was the uncritical response of so many Jews who affirmed that that was the way it was - Pius XII was mainly responsible. Most contemporary Jews are products of the Enlightenment, have a rational critical faculty and can be expected to understand the issues of the Nazi period in their full complexity. That so many of our people accepted the Hochhuth drama as the whole story reveals and confirms the huge burden of anguish the Nazi experience has placed upon the Jewish psyche and soul. It has been intolerable to live with the knowledge that the Jewish people was singled out for total extermination by an advanced 20th century nation. How can one manage to stay sane in the face of that ultimate irrationality and madness? Some answer is necessary to ease the pain of that shattering realization. If Pius XII is an answer, even a partial and least bit rational answer, then so let it be, said the unsettled Jewish conscience. The Jews' preoccupation and agitation--tragically with such good reason--about Christian silence in the face of Nazi savagery, must now also be considered in terms of its deep psychic meaning. Perplexity over the almost total conformity of Christian institutions and leaders to the demands of the Nazi regime in Germany, and the silence and indifference of Christians in other countries, has diverted Jews until recently from another gnawing preoccupation, namely, with the inadequacy of their own response to their European brothers who were being prepared "like sheep unto the

slaughter." Only now, some 25 years later, are Jews able to begin to face the questions: "Where were we? Did we do enough?"

There have been efforts to express this preoccupation constructively. The Jewish community recently organized an emergency relief campaign to provide food, clothing, medicines, and money for the victims of the Nigerian-Biafran struggle. The response was incredible. Within a brief period of months, the Jewish community organizations turned over to Church World Service, Catholic Relief Services, UNICEF and other relief bodies more than 500 tons of supplies and about \$350,000. Also, as is generally known, many Jews have been identified with the struggle for social justice for the black, brown, red and other deprived white peoples of this nation. Jews were prominent in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, in the marches to Selma and Memphis, and in inner city work in the slums and ghettos of the North.

There are no Jews, to my knowledge, in Nigeria or Biafra. Most of the tribesmen are either Muslims, animists, or Christian Ibos. There is very little prospect that they will become Jews, certainly in our lifetime. There are very few Jews among the 21 million Negroes in this country. The unprecedented outpouring of relief aid to the people of Nigeria and Biafra was a genuine act of Jewish identification with them on the basis of their common humanity, assuredly motivated by the prophetic inheritance of Judaism. Similarly, involvement in the social-justice struggle of blacks and other poor people is an authentic Jewish expression of humanitarian conscience. But increasingly I am persuaded that the disproportionate involvement of Jews, and the "surplus of intensity" of the Jewish response, reveals that another force is at work in the Jewish soul. These marches and these instant responses of relief aid to distant Africans are, on the deepest levels, an act of delayed atonement for the marches we did not make in the 1930s and 1940s to Washington, Paris, Berlin and Warsaw, when it might have made some difference; for the food, clothing, and medicine we were not able to get through to Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Auschwitz when it might have brought relief and comfort to our brothers and sisters.

Learning to live in the shadow of the Nazi holocaust involves thinking not only about the meaning of being a Jew, but the meaning of being human as well. In the unique deposits of historical data inherited by contemporary Jewry is the fact that in the years between 1939 and 1945 of the Christian era, and in Germany, the seat of the Holy Roman Empire and the heartland of the great Protestant Reformation, it was possible for thousands of persons to buy for twenty-five cents, a phial of Zyklon-B gas that could wipe out the lives of a hundred human beings within minutes. The conclusion from this scientific data, is that human life became literally worthless; the value of human existence itself has been called into question. For the Jew who has managed

to survive and live in this day, the Nazi holocaust has impaired the image of God, of man, and of the moral order in the universe. Only since the revelations of what happened in Auschwitz have we begun to hear Jewish theologians speak of the death of God, the deus absconditus, who has hidden His face from us. (4)

When, therefore, Jews heard the rhetoric and themes of genocide and "final solution" in the May and June 1967 proclamations from Cairo, Amman, Damascus, and Baghdad, the sleeper reaction to the Nazi holocaust was instantly awakened. There were two distinctively new Jewish themes in the overwhelming united response to these threats, both permanent and universal lessons engraved on Jewish consciousness in the wake of the Nazi trauma. In the 1930's, Jews in Germany did not believe Hitler's proclamation that he would exterminate them, even though it was explicitly formulated in Mein Kampf and in hundreds of other threats. Jews today believe what their enemies say and take it seriously. Second, Jews will never again be silent in the face of persecution and threats of annihilation: the world may find reasons to abandon Jews; Jews will never again abandon Jews, anywhere.

This transformed consciousness of the Jewish people and the bonds of solidarity between the diaspora and Israel amount to a refusal to give Hitler and the Nazi murderers a final victory over both Jews and civilized humanity.

## II - THE MEANING OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

To comprehend the present meaning of the State of Israel to the Jewish people it is essential that we see it in some historic and theological perspectives, involving the Biblical, post-Biblical and contemporary periods. So vast and complex is the literature on this subject that one must limit himself to summary conclusions (and refer the interested reader to available bibliographies).

Before this group of distinguished Christian and Jewish scholars, so many of whom are steeped in Biblical scholarship, it is unnecessary, and would be a presumption, to dwell on the Biblical bases of the Jewish relationship to Israel as the Holy Land. A few examples of the rich contemporary literature on this subject are R.H. Charles' study on Eschatology, Harry Orlinsky on Ancient Israel; B. Locker on The Covenant Everlasting; Israel: An Echo of Eternity, by Abraham J. Heschel; The Zionist Idea, by Arthur Hertzberg; The Five Roots of Israel, by James Parkes, among a host of other works. (5)

There is abundant Biblical evidence on this central theme. Israel became a nation at the Exodus, but the promises of the ultimate greatness

of Israel, and its destiny as a source of blessing to all mankind were made before to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Central in the covenant with Abraham was God's promise of the land of Canaan, (Gen. 17·8), "To thee and thy seed . for an everlasting possession."

The bond between the chosen people and the chosen land became inextricable in the minds of Biblical and Prophetic authors. Palestine was not only the scene providentially chosen for the formation of children of Israel into "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," but also the axis mundi, the center of the prophetic doctrine of the coming kingdom

Ezekiel, while a captive carried away by Nebuchadnezzar, has good tidings not only for the people of Israel (Chapter 37, the vision of the "valley of bones"), but also for the land bereaved of its people

"But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people of Israel, for they are at hand to come. For behold I am for you and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown; And I will multiply men upon you, all the House of Israel, even all of it, and the cities shall be inhabited and the wastes shall be builded; And I will multiply you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit; and I will settle you after old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 36· 8-11).

Similarly, there is much evidence in post-Biblical history and experience to support the Jewish concept that the land of Israel is deeply intertwined with the faith and the destiny of the people of Israel. Let us take this citation from Elias Bickerman's study, From Ezra to the Maccabees:

"The postbiblical period of Jewish history begins toward the end of 450 BCE (the period of Nehemiah). That period is marked by a unique and rewarding polarity: on the one hand, the Jerusalem center and, on the other, the plurality of centers in the Diaspora. The Dispersion saved Judaism from physical extirpation and spiritual inbreeding. Palestine united the dispersed members of the nation and gave them a sense of oneness. This counterpoise of historical forces is without analogy in antiquity.

"The Jewish Dispersion continued to consider Jerusalem as the 'metropolis' (Philo), turned to the Holy Land for guidance, and in turn determined the destinies of its inhabitants. Men who established normative Judaism in Palestine - Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah - came from the diaspora, from Babylon and Susa.

"The Diaspora clung to its unique God and to Jerusalem, the unique center of lawful worship. But at the same time, the God of Zion...was not only the God of the Jews. He was the sole God in heaven and earth, the so-called deities of the pagans were nothing but vain idols. Hence the polarity of Jerusalem and the dispersion had its ideological counterpart in the paradoxical combination of universal monotheism and particularism, in the conception that the sole Lord of the universe dwells on the hillock of Zion. This theological paradox held the Jews in the Dispersion together, and from all points of the compass they directed their eyes to the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem."  
(6)

Bickerman's formulation does justice to the ideational reality that existed in the minds of post-Biblical Jewry. The consequences of that relationship between the holy land and the diaspora can be appreciated only by studying its effects in history across the centuries until now. So profound was the hold on the religious imagination of world Jewry of Jerusalem as the holy city and Palestine/Israel as the spiritual center, that in every century there were waves of aliyah (immigration) to the holy land. Over the past two thousand years there have been at least thirteen different regimes ruling Palestine, but Jews managed nevertheless to maintain an unbroken stream of pilgrims and settlers in its cities and villages.

Two vital historic footnotes: there has never been an Arab political state in Palestine; the several Arab dynasties that governed Palestine since the rise of Islam in the 7th century ruled the country as a military satrapy from distant centers in Cairo, Baghdad, or Damascus. The only time in which Palestine was organized and governed as a sovereign political state was when it was under Jewish rule.

The religious symbolism of the holy city and the holy land, with their powerful messianic and eschatological motifs, has dominated the entire synagogal, liturgical, and halachic discipline of world Jewry from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah down to this day. No synagogue or temple can be erected anywhere in the inhabited world unless the holy ark and Torah scrolls are planned to face in the direction of Jerusalem, the site of the Holy Temple. Each of the major pilgrim festivals of Sukkoth (Tabernacles), Passover, and Shavuoth (Pentecost) involves the whole of worshipping Jewry in a reenactment of past experiences of redemption relating them to the scene of the Jews' historic origins as a people in the Promised Land, and yearning together for some future Messianic redemption which in some mysterious, providential way will be bound up with the future of the Promised Land.

The daily, Sabbath, and festival prayers of the Jewish people reiterate the constant refrain, "and rebuild Jerusalem speedily in our day,". "extend thy canopy of peace over Jerusalem we pray." The theme is repeated throughout the grace after meals. At the climax of the Jewish wedding, the groom breaks a glass recalling the tragic destruction of the religious and national shrine of Jerusalem, and a prayer is chanted looking forward to the bride and groom rejoicing in the streets of Jerusalem. (The text from "the seven marriage benedictions" reads: "Soon may there be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the jubilant voice of bridegrooms from their nuptial canopies, and of youths from their feasts of song.") Pious Jews, in their last wills and testaments, insisted that their families purchase soil from the holy land so that it could be placed in their coffins, suggesting some metaphysical, mystical link with the soil on which, tradition asserts, the resurrection of the dead will begin.

Quite obviously, many Jews today do not believe in these religious ideas, and some practice few of the rituals except for the rites de passage which inevitably confront them with these traditions. But enough Jews have believed in the truth of these Biblical, prophetic, and rabbinic ideas and traditions, and a large enough number continue to be attached to them today, to account for the profound latent emotional, historic, and spiritual attachment to Israel that became manifest when her existence appeared to be threatened in June 1967. Something fundamental in the Jewish religion - despite the unclarity of the messianic and eschatological aspects of contemporary Israel - was at stake the very continuity of Jewish history in all its paradox was threatened, and its sacrifice in such a savage and ignominious end was intolerable. Jews indeed behaved better than they truly understood

One additional explanation is necessary to round out an understanding of the meaning of Israel to contemporary Jewry. As one studies the historical literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries, one is struck by the extraordinary preoccupation of the most prominent Christian scholars with the Jewish predicament of marginality in the Christian West. Max Weber, in his monumental study on Ancient Judaism (1917-19) describes the status of the Jews in Western Europe in these words:

"Sociologically speaking, the Jews were a pariah people, which means.. that they were a guest people who were ritually separated, formally and de facto, from their social surroundings." The closest analogy that Weber could find for the Jewish situation was that of the "untouchables in the Indian caste system."

Heinrich von Treitschke, historian and high priest of Prussianism, wrote a series of articles in 1879 in the Preussische Jahrbücher in which he declared: "The Jews are our misfortune." Paul de Lagarde, son of a Lutheran minister, authority on the Septuagint, and adherent of German deism, asserted, "To let the Jews into Prussia today... is to turn Prussia into Palestine."

Jews found themselves condemned as capitalist and socialist, as primitive religionist and atheist. The intellectual and academic atmosphere was filled with religious and racial anti-Semitism.

"The Aryan lives by honest labor, the Semite by management, jobbing and exploitation. The Aryans are the true creators in philosophy, religion and science; the Semites are the imitators and plagiarists." (August Rohling and Eugen Dühring). (7)

In response to these incessant diagnoses of the Jewish predicament by Christian scholars and divines, Jews were determined to provide their own prognosis on putting a decisive end to their pariah status. As in the days of Saul, they now were resolved to become a nation like unto all the nations.

Thus Jews in 19th-century Europe fused the strains of the inherited spiritual traditions in which Palestine was so markedly central, with the Christian and Western solutions for national normalcy which they learned as active participants in every major movement for national self-determination on the Continent. In Russia, the pogroms of the 1880's, 1903, and 1907 that "convulsed the Pale of Settlement" stoked the fires of Jewish nationalism. Moses Rischin notes: "In the face of unprecedented barbarism the Zionist impulse, which had remained dormant despite the existence for over a generation of the "Lovers of Zion" and other Zionist groups, acquired life. Jewish youth marshaled courage in an effort to salvage its self-respect and that of fellow Jews...They (Zionists) drew up schemes and programs for the rescue of oppressed Jews that helped sustain morale in these terrible times." (8)

Thus Israel became a haven for the oppressed Jews from every nation on the Continent. It also became the symbol and reality of the normalization of the Jew. Israel became the most systematic expression of the Jewish presence in the world. Despite the success of Jews in other democratic countries, Israel was the only spatial center in which Jews created out of the distinctive Jewish ethos and their own intellectual, spiritual and moral resources economic, military, political and social institutions. Not to use the word lightly, Israel represents the

incarnation of Jewishness in the world.

Despite the richness and vitality of diaspora Jewish religious experience, it is in Israel that the Jewish religious and moral systems are being put to the crucial test. The relation and relevance of the synagogue and rabbinic Judaism to the moralizing of secular power is being tested here as nowhere else in the world. It is in Israel that Jews as a majority society encounter history and shape modernity.

If these expressions of the Jewish reality in the world were to become expendable, then being a Jew anywhere becomes expendable, certainly profoundly diminished. Jews therefore cannot tolerate the prospect of the undermining of the State of Israel, or the weakening of the unique experiment and mission of the Jewish people and society in Israel, for in their survival and destiny there is at stake the success or failure of the nearly 4,000 year-old mission of the people, the faith, and the land of Israel.

(In a companion paper, I deal with the implications of the existence of the State of Israel for Jewish-Christian relations).



FOOTNOTES

- 1 The Record of Aggression, distributed by the Israel Information Services, New York, July 1967.
- 2. Legends of Our Time, by Elie Wiesel, Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1968.
- 3. German Catholics and Hitler's Wars, by Gordon Zahn, Sheed and Ward 1962, New York.
- . The German Phoenix-Men and Movements in the Church in Germany, by Franklin Littell, Doubleday and Co , New York, 1960.
- . The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany, by Guenter Lewy, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964, New York.
- . Pius XII and the Third Reich. A Documentation, by Saul Friedlander, Alfred Knopf, 1966.
- . The Church's Confession Under Hitler, by Arthur C Cochrane, The Westminster Press, 1962, Phila, Pa.
- . The Reaction of the Religious Press in America to the Emergence of Nazism, by Frederick K. Wentz, 1954, University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
- 4. After Auschwitz, by Richard Rubenstein, Indianapolis-Bobbs-Merrill-1966.
- 5. A significant body of writing on this subject has begun to appear in such journals as The Journal of Ecumenical Studies (articles by Rev. Edward Flannery; Rabbi Jacob Agus, etc.).
- Commentary, August 1967, published by the American Jewish Committee.
- Tradition, published by the Rabbinical Council of America.
- Judaism, published by the American Jewish Congress.
- Conservative Judaism, published by the Rabbinical Assembly.
- CCAR Journal, published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis.
- United Synagogue Review, published by the United Synagogue of America.
- . The Religious Dimension of the Six-Day War, published by The Synagogue Council of America.

. American Judaism and Dimensions, published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

/To my knowledge, few articles of this character have appeared in Christian scholarly or religious journals/

6. From Ezra to the Maccabees, by Elias Bickerman, Schocken Books, N.Y. 1962

7. Peter G.J. Pulzer, The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria, New York, Wiley, 1964.

8. The Promised City, by Moses Rischin, Hebrew Union Press, 1962

9. An annotated bibliography on Jews and Judaism, Jewish-Christian Relations, is available by writing to Rabbi Tanenbaum, American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56 Street, New York 10022.

