

### Christians must love Israel:

The Jews are of the same blood as Jesus and it has been written that no man ever hates his own flesh (Eph. 5:29). **Christians must love Israel not only in memory, but also in hope**; not only for what it was, but for what it will be. Their fall says the Apostle, 'is not forever' and God 'has the power to graft them in again' (Rom. 11:11, 23). If their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15). Simeon said that Jesus would cause 'the fall and resurrection of many in Israel' (Luke 2:34) which could be understood as, first for the fall and then for the resurrection of Israel.

### Church must love the Jews:

On that journey these thoughts unexpectedly gave rise to the certainty in me that the Church has a responsibility towards Israel. It is responsible in a unique way, differently from how it is to all other people. The Church alone guards in her heart and keeps alive God's project for Israel. This responsibility of faith requires the Church to love the Jews, to wait for them, to ask, as it already does, their pardon for having, in certain times, hidden the true Jesus from them, that Jesus Who loves them and Who is their 'glory'.

### New Signs in the Church:

In this light we can understand the new signs we are experiencing in the Church, such as the *Nostra Aetate* document of the 2nd Vatican Council, the **Pope's visit to the Jewish synagogue** in Rome, where he addressed the Jews as 'elder brothers' and, finally, the norms emanated by Rome **to eliminate from the Christian catechism and preaching all those elements and ways of expression that could offend** the sensitivity of the Jews and that are not required by faithfulness to the Word of God.

### God gave them the land forever:

Together with this responsibility, there is another that concerns the present situation of Israel as a people and a state. Human and political judgements can be made on their present situation, as can judgements of theology and faith. There is a whole area of different opinions here. The unresolved problem of the Palestinians makes these political judgements more of a condemnation of Israel than of approval. But, as I have already mentioned, Christians cannot stop at these political or diplomatic judgements. There is a theological dimension to the problem, which only the Church can feel. We share with the Jews the Biblical certainty that **God gave them the country of Canaan forever** (Genesis 17:8, Isaiah 43:5, Jeremiah 32:22, Ezekiel 36:24, Amos 9:14). We know that the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

### Return of Israel to the Land:

In other words **we know that God gave Israel the land, but there is no mention of His taking it back again forever**. Can we Christians exclude what we see happening in our day that the return of Israel to the land of their fathers, is not connected in some way to this providential order which concerns the chosen people and which is carried out even through human error and excess, as happens in the Church itself?

### Israel must be a Nation:

If Israel as a whole is to enter the New Covenant one day, St. Paul tells us that they will not do so a few at a time, but as an entire nation, as ever living 'roots'. **But if Israel is to enter as a nation, it must be a nation, it must have a land of its own**, an organisation and a voice in the midst of the other nations of the earth. The fact that Israel has remained an ethnic unity throughout the centuries and throughout many historical upheavals is, in itself, a sign of a destiny that has not been interrupted, but is waiting to be fulfilled. Many people have been driven out of their land over the centuries but not one of them has been able to remain intact as a people in their new situation. Faced with this fact we cannot but remember the words of God in **Jeremiah 31:36** 'If this fixed order (sun, moon, stars, sea) departs from before Me', says the Lord, 'then shall the descendants of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.'

### Christians must grasp this mystery:

Even the cross that Israel carried on its shoulders is a sign that God is preparing a 'resurrection' for it. The Jews themselves are not able to completely grasp this sign in their history, because they have not completely accepted the idea that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into 'His glory (Luke 24:26) but **we Christians must grasp it**. When Edith Stein saw the tragedy that the Nazis were preparing for her people, she wrote: *'There beneath the Cross, I understood the destiny of God's people. I thought that those who know this are duty bound to take it upon themselves in the name of all the others'*. And she in fact took it upon herself, in the name of all the others.

### Conversion of both Israel & Church:

The Church therefore keeps watch over these signs as Mary kept the words in her heart and meditated on them (Luke 2:19) The Church cannot go back and take on the features of the old Israel, with its strong bond between race, land and faith. What is required is that Israel enter into and become part of Israel according to the Spirit, without having to cease being Israel also



according to the flesh. Thus St Paul, together with all those who have passed from the old to the new covenant, can say; *'Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I'* (2 Cor. 11:22). Only in Christ is the destiny of the Hebrew people fulfilled and its greatness discovered. We are not saying this in a spirit of proselytism, but in a spirit of obedience to the Word of God, because it is **certain that the rejoining of Israel with the Church will involve a rearrangement in the Church**; it will mean a **conversion on both sides**. It will also be a rejoining of the Church with Israel.

### Messianic Jews – healing Great Original Schism

The reconstitution of the Jewish Nation is a wonderful sign and opportunity for the Church itself, **the importance of which we are not yet able to grasp**. Only now can Israel take up again the question of Jesus of Nazareth and, to a certain degree, this is what is happening. Quite a few in the Jewish religion have started to acknowledge Jesus as 'the glory of Israel' They openly acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and call themselves 'Messianic Jews'. These help us to overcome certain gloomy prospects of ours, making us realise that **the great original schism afflicting the Church and impoverishing it**, is not so much the schism between East & West or between Catholics & Protestants, as the more radical one **between the Church & Israel**.

### The Glory of His people Israel:

The fact that Christ is 'a light for the Gentiles' is not seen as a punishment for Israel but as its 'glory'. How lovely it is, in the Christmas context, to put **this original view of things back into the centre of the Church's attention** because, in the end, this will be fulfilled, as nothing and no one can prevent God's plan from being accomplished in the time established by Him. One day **Christ** will also be, in deed, both **'a light for the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel'** as He already is by right. Simeon's was not just a wish but a prophecy.

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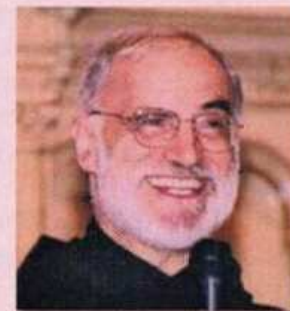


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## Reconstitution of the Jewish nation:



### An opportunity for the Church

by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa,

#### Conversion to Israel:

This was my own experience some years ago during my second pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The first thing I realised while still on the way there was that, as a Christian, **I could not remain prisoner of the political judgements the world was passing on Israel**. I was obliged to love this people, because of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ. I should love them as Jesus, Mary, the Apostles and the whole of the primitive Church that came from the Jew, did. It was a question of a kind of conversion to Israel that I had never experienced before and, like all conversions, **it exacted a change of mentality and heart**.

#### Reconciliation between Israel & the Church:

We Christians must do all we can, if Christ is the glory of His people, Israel, to remove the obstacles that prevent Israel from acknowledging this. The first and most important obstacle to be removed is what St. Paul called 'hostility', built on mutual incomprehension and resentment, that Jesus knocked down by His death on the Cross (Ephesians 2:14), but which must still be knocked down in deed, especially after all that has taken place in the last twenty centuries since Christ's resurrection. St Paul teaches us that the best way to a reconciliation between Israel and the Church is through love and esteem: 'For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants...of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ' (Romans 9:1-5).