

# Correspondence

## Zionism and the Century

To the Editors:

I appreciate your courtesy in sending me an advance copy of the article by Robert Gordis ("Zionism, Judaism and the State of Israel," *Worldview*, June) which mentions me and *The Christian Century*. His article deals with only one of the three long reports I developed from my Israeli trip, and it is a piece written in a polemical style that I find self-defeating. The long section detailing the history of Zionism repeats what was already common knowledge to me and, I am sure, to *Century* readers. The point of my first sentence still stands, however: In terms of the political reality of what did take place in 1948, Zionism as a dream of centuries would not have been actualized in history at that particular moment without the pressure of the Holocaust, because by 1948 the spirit of anti-colonialism was indeed putting an end to such ventures. This is not a value judgment as to whether or not the State of Israel should have come into existence; it is a statement of journalistic interpretation which I think is fairly obvious to any viewer, regardless of whether he favors or doesn't favor the creation of the State.

I think the Gordis statement that the *Century* has "an unbroken record of hostility to Zionism" is not designed to encourage dialogue. It presumes a mindset that persists among editors of the magazine, and as one who has come to this spot only within the past two years, I find Gordis's comment somewhat akin to the generalization that all Methodists hate alcohol. What I am after in the *Century* is a discussion of the Mideast situation at a level of some rationality. I don't expect to find that rationality in the living room of a mother in Jerusalem whose son has just been killed by Arab terrorists. Nor would I ask her

to be rational on the topic. But in the pages of the *Century* some rationality is in order and is to be expected.

I think also that in the interest of dialogue the reference to the creation of Arab refugee camps should not be left as simply the fault of Arab leaders. At best there is ambiguity over this matter, and the best I have been able to determine is that the British, the Israelis and the Arab leaders, all for their own reasons, helped create the hasty departure of many Arab residents from what is today the State of Israel. Also, I have grown weary of hearing the kind of argument that says "your hands are dirtier than mine." The subject matter I focused on dealt with the West Bank and the danger of this continued occupation to the internal strength of the State of Israel. Had Gordis also dealt with my third article in the series, he would have seen my effort to deal with the matter of the Bir Zeit College situation. In short, I don't think Gordis seeks dialogue. He seeks to make a polemical point, and in an emotion-laden situation like this one we are not lacking in persons willing to express deep emotions from either side. My effort was to be open, which I think is the role of the journalist.

James M. Wall

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: Fair-minded persons always rejoice when a defense is made of any party who has been wrongly accused. Accordingly, a salute is due Rabbi Robert Gordis for his article in the June *Worldview*.

That salute would be heartier if he had stopped there and not gone on to make the major portion of his article a pure reworking of the tired and tendentious clichés of Zionist doctrine. That too could be accepted for what it is worth. But what requires further brief comment is found in his quotation from a former statement of his own.

Nahum Goldmann and David Ben-Gurion may be the possessors of "little minds," though most peo-

ple, including the undersigned, do not thus dismiss them. They were among the creators of the State of Israel, and it was both of them who continually urged the Jews of the rest of the world to harbor a "dual allegiance."

Coming to the last sentence of Dr. Gordis's self-quote, the first clause, "They [American Jews] owe no political allegiance to the State of Israel," is so self-evident that even to assert it raises the question that its assertion could be necessary. Of course nobody *owes* a particle of allegiance to any country but his own, and there is no power on earth or elsewhere that can require such allegiance. However, Dr. Gordis follows this truism with a startling error of fact in the second clause, on which his entire argument rests heavily and which reads: "Nor does the government of the young republic expect it of them." The fact is that the Israeli government does indeed call for, and expect, the political allegiance of Jews in other countries. That has been clearly spelled out in basic Israeli laws and resolutions of the World Zionist Organization (which is officially related to the Israeli government) too lengthy and numerous to reproduce here.

In addition to Dr. Gordis, salutes should be in order also to all those American Jews who have throughout maintained their allegiance to the United States equitable with that of Americans of other faiths; all the more so, since, as is not the case with other religious groups, it has not been purely because demands for allegiance to—or "solidarity with"—a specific foreign country have not been made of them. This is the only category of people in the world exposed to such pressure—even though many members of it are unaware of where that pressure originates.

Richard Korn

New York, N.Y.

Robert Gordis Responds:

I heartily endorse the desire James Wall has expressed in his response

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that at base Christian theology is polytheistic." Moral: Stay away from the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion.

**Speaking of God Today:  
Jews and Lutherans  
in Conversation**  
edited by Paul D. Opsahl  
and Marc H. Tanenbaum  
(Fortress; 178 pp.; \$6.95)

A remarkable and important book, taking us many steps beyond Brotherhood Week sentimentality. For four years, under the sponsorship of the American Jewish Committee and the Lutheran Council, USA, Jewish and Lutheran philosophers and theologians engaged in disciplined conversation about the truth claims and ethics of their respective faiths. No holds were barred, although gentility and reason prevailed, issuing in a collection of essays that may be of historic significance. The essay by Franklin Sherman, "Speaking of God After Auschwitz," is itself worth the price of entry.

**Kingdom Come!**

by Robert S. Paul

(Eerdmans; 88 pp.; \$2.25 [paper])

Reflections of a church historian (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) on the Church's role as witness to judgment and reconciliation in a revolutionary age. The theology is conservative, the social analysis somewhat vague, but overall a sensible, although slight, essay.

**Correspondence**

(from p. 2)

to my paper, "Zionism, Judaism and the State of Israel" for "openness," "rationality" and "dialogue." It is a pity only that this desire was not made manifest when my paper was submitted to *The Christian Century*, in which his original article appeared. In my covering letter to him I suggested that the Editor should be interested in presenting all viewpoints on so tragic and controversial

an issue as that of Israel and its Arab neighbors. At that time Wall did not find it necessary even to include a note with the printed rejection slip that accompanied the manuscript back to its author. Wall seems to object to what he calls "the polemical" tone of my article. I venture to suggest that polemics are better than suppression. However, better late than never. I only regret that many, if not most, of *The Christian Century* readers will not see the other side of the dialogue.

Wall declares that "I think the Gordis statement that the *Century* has 'an unbroken record of hostility to Zionism' is not designed to encourage dialogue." At the risk of being simpleminded, the question is not whether my statement is designed "to encourage dialogue," but whether it is true. Any fairly regular reader of *The Christian Century* knows that it is—even Wall does not deny it—and today the documentation is available in Hertzfel Fishman's definitive volume, *American Protestantism and the Jewish State* (Wayne State University Press).

Wall contends that "The long section detailing the history of Zionism repeats what was already common knowledge to me, and, I am sure, to *Century* readers." He has, unfortunately, missed the point. The long section does not "detail the history of Zionism," but presents the highlights of the record of the indissoluble bond linking Judaism and Jews with the State of Israel for nineteen centuries before the rise of political Zionism. This record and its implications Wall ignored in his original piece and continues to ignore now. It still remains incomprehensible to me how a believing Christian, writing in a religious journal, to whom the Bible as the religious expression of Israel's historic experience should have significance, could ignore this record so cavalierly.

In his response Wall restates his opening sentence, to which I took exception on the ground that he equated Zionism with colonialism and the *raison d'être* of the State of Israel with the Nazi Holocaust.

However, a comparison of Wall's original formulation and his paraphrase makes it clear that our discussion has not been in vain. There is a subtle but unmistakable shifting of ground, as a comparison of the two passages makes clear. The original sentence read: "Had it not been for the Holocaust, the spirit of *Zionism* might have died with the *rising tide of anticolonialism*, and the new State of Israel *might never have come into existence*." The second version reads: "The point of my first sentence still stands, however: In terms of the political reality of what did take place in 1948, *Zionism as a dream of centuries* would not have been actualized in history *at that particular moment* without the pressure of the Holocaust, because by 1949 the spirit of anticolonialism was indeed putting an end to *such ventures*." The words "would not have been actualized in history at that particular moment" are hardly identical with "never" in the original text. Moreover, the new version speaks of "Zionism as a dream of centuries," which is a plus against the original identification of Zionism and colonialism. Yet Wall persists in saying "The spirit of anticolonialism is indeed putting an end to such ventures." What "such ventures" does he have in mind? Whatever his personal bias may be, does he really see no difference between the history of Jewish resettlement and rebuilding of the land, and the colonial regimes set up by European powers in Asia and Africa? I don't expect to find rationality on this question among embittered Arab terrorists, but from the Editor of *The Christian Century* some rationality is in order and is to be expected.

I find it unnecessary to respond to the farfetched similes that Wall seems to regard as arguments. It still remains true that his reticences are more eloquent than his explications. He remains totally silent on the status of the masses in Arab lands and in Israel, the failure of Arab potentates to lift a finger toward the rehabilitation of their "Arab brothers," the intransigence

of Arab states that presumably signed the United Nations covenant, and the disingenuousness of the claim by guerrilla spokesmen to set up "a secular democratic state" in Palestine in view of the record of democracy and humanity exhibited by existing Arab states. The continued failure of even one Arab leader to recognize the existence of the State of Israel was reflected most recently in the antics of the Syrians at the signing of the disengagement agreement. Wall's sensitivity and concern that the Israelis remove the beam from their eyes are praiseworthy; one hopes that he will develop a comparable zeal that their neighbor remove the beam from theirs.

Readers of my original article know that I have a lively appreciation of the just claims of the Palestinian Arabs. I would have wished to see an equal recognition in Wall's article of the just claims of the Jewish people, which are not the result of the Holocaust. It is unfortunate that he was troubled by those sections of my essay which were critical in character and ignored the later sections which are the most significant. Here the uniqueness of the Jewish people, in which religion, culture and ethnicity constitute an organic unity, is explicated both in historical terms and as a theological concept. To be sure, this phenomenon is often misunderstood both within the Jewish community and without. It is the indispensable key for grasping the special relationship of the people, the faith, the culture, of Israel with the land of Israel.

In all human situations the cardinal sin is the refusal to negotiate, or at least to talk. Even the most distant position becomes more intelligible to the other side when it is set forth and discussed and the possibility of agreement is enhanced. I have no desire to score points in a debate, only to raise the level of discussion by including all the elements of the problem. It would have been fine if the discussion had taken place in the columns of *The Christian Century*. It is infinitely more important that the Arabs and the

Israelis engage in a dialogue. Perhaps we are now witnessing the first glimmer of a new dawn.

If I am not mistaken, Mr. Richard Korn is one of the last remaining spokesmen of the American Council for Judaism, which has been moribund for years. The anti-Zionist stance of this minuscule group has been repudiated by the overwhelming majority of American Jews of all groups and tendencies. They are united in their support of the State of Israel, which, let it be stated for the umpteenth time, does not mean an endorsement of all its official policies, any more than American patriotism means a total acceptance of Administration practices or ideas.

I am certain that in spite of virtually total rejection by American Jews of the philosophy of the American Council for Judaism, Mr. Korn will not maintain that his group has a monopoly on the American patriotism of American Jews.

I appreciate Mr. Korn's words of praise, though I do not quite understand what I have done to deserve them. With regard to the more extensive and less complimentary sections of his letter, I should like to make the following comments:

1. To attribute to me the view that "Nahum Goldmann and David Ben-Gurion are possessors of 'little minds'" is incredible. The "little minds" to whom I refer are those who imagine that loyalty to another land, religious or cultural or sentimental, means "dual political allegiance." Multiple loyalties, on the contrary, are the marks of a civilized spirit.

2. His "summary" of the resolutions allegedly adopted by the World Zionist Organization is, to put it mildly, a total distortion, however well-intentioned Mr. Korn may conceive himself to be. The State of Israel has never demanded or expected or received the political allegiance of American Jews who are Zionist or pro-Israel. That some Jews feel impelled to settle in the Holy Land and help build Jewish life in the homeland is psychologically on a par with American missionaries who for love of the Gospel leave kith and kin be-

hind to spend their lives in Africa and other remote areas to bring the Christian message to their fellow men.

3. With regard to the "tired and tendentious Zionist clichés" in my paper, since Mr. Korn has not taken the trouble to identify them, I cannot pass judgment on just how tired these clichés are. But I have my doubts, since they have clearly not yet penetrated his thought world. The basic thesis of my paper, validated both by Jewish tradition and history, is that religion, culture and peoplehood are organically interrelated in Judaism and that in this indissoluble relationship the Holy Land occupies a central position. In my paper I sought to lay bare the historical Jewish experience and the underlying theological outlook which created this situation that is unique in the modern world. Most Jews and Christians may not be aware of the historical or theological foundations, but they recognize and respond to this reality of Jewish life.

4. Finally, Mr. Korn states ". . . nobody owes a particle of allegiance to any country but his own, and there is no power on earth or elsewhere that can require such allegiance." I recall that it was the American patriot and Founding Father, James Otis, who adopted as his motto, *Ubi libertas, ibi patria*, "Wherever there is freedom, there is my country," and he was not a political Zionist.

## Correction

To the Editors: Upon returning from an extended trip abroad, I had the opportunity to carefully read my article on the Middle East which appeared in your February, 1974, issue.

I find in rereading the article that there is an obvious typographical error on page ten (top, second column) before the word Jerusalem. I would not and could not refer to Jerusalem as "military Jerusalem." The word in my original manuscript is "unitary."

Arthur J. Goldberg  
Washington, D.C.