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Remarks on CHRISTIANITY AND ZIONISM: A NECESSARY DIALOGUE

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**Jewish-Christian dialogue
urged to look at Zionism**

BALTIMORE (AP) — A noted Roman Catholic theologian, the Rev. John T. Pawlikowski, has urged that Jewish-Christian dialogue give special attention to Zionism, saying some Christians still regard that term with uneasiness, if not outright hostility.

He told a convention of the Zionist Organization of America that "no Christian-Jewish dialogue can be complete" if the agenda does not include Zionism — the movement that led to re-establishing the Jewish state of Israel.

Pawlikowski, a professor of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, said that if Christians continue to exclude Zionism from discussion, "they are in fact asking for a dialogue with an emaciated form of Judaism."

In a plenary address to the 8th National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations held in St. Louis in 1984 I called upon the Christian churches to begin to turn their attention in a serious fashion to the various faces of Zionism. No Christian-Jewish dialogue can be complete without such an encounter. I strongly reaffirm that call before you this morning.

I believe that even at the highest levels of Christianity some breakthroughs are appearing in this regard, though the ice has been very slow to melt. The 1985 Vatican NOTES on proper presentation of Jews and Judaism in Christian education include Israel for the first time as a legitimate topic for inter-religious conversion rather than merely being relegated to the category of politics. But unfortunately many, many Christians, even those otherwise sensitive to the tragic history of antisemitism, still regard the term "Zionism" with uneasiness, if not outright hostility. While only a small number would be prepared to go as far as the infamous United Nations declaration on Zionism as Racism their basic inclination is to place Zionism on Judaism's "unenlightened" side. And they tend to assume automatically that any effort to include Zionism on the dialogue agenda will result in hardsell attempts by the Jewish participants to have Christians adopt a no-compromise, anti-Arab posture towards contemporary Middle East political negotiations.

My colleague Dr. Rosemary Ruether of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is one example of such a Christian scholar. Even if one does not go along fully with her conclusions about the anti-Judaism endemic in Christian theology since the earliest period of the church found in her ground-breaking volume FAITH & FRATRICIDE, it is clear she exhibits a remarkable sensitivity to the pain suffered by Jews throughout the centuries because of anti-Judaism which she thoroughly repudiates. Yet when it comes to the question of Zionism a blind spot looms large. In a column in the September 1984 issue of the NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER she described her negative reaction to receiving an invitation to participate in the first Zionist-Christian dialogue hosted by your organization in New York. She argued in that column that such a dialogue would only obfuscate the real issue and prove counterproductive for communications between Christians and Jews. Such an effort was to be dismissed out of hand. She then went on to say that while Zionism should not be branded as racism in the manner of the UN declaration, it does represent a form of narrow nationalism that is totally unacceptable by today's standards. Though she does not herself use the term, it would appear she considers Zionism roughly equivalent to facism. Until Israel completely abandons Zionism as a basis for state identity, its moral stature will remain very low indeed. After personal interventions by some Israeli Zionist doves, Ruether modified her position somewhat in a subsequent NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER article (December 28, 1984).

This reaction by a scholar who has spoken out so strongly against antisemitism in all its other forms shows how urgent is the need for a serious, sustained and comprehensive conversation between Zionist and Christians. I deliberately underscore these three characteristics of such a dialogue if it is to break open the old barriers on this subject. The dialogue must in no way give the impression that it is simply a tool of immediate Israeli governmental propaganda. And it must be on-going and develop an agenda for dealing with the many issues involved. If the dialogue becomes repetitious and scatter-shot Christian participants will quickly lose interest. Finally, it shall have to be comprehensive in the sense of bringing to the surface the full range of Zionist perspectives, left and right, religious and secular, as they have developed during this century and continue to interface at the present moment. To be clear on this point, while an organization such as yours may assume the principal responsibility for sponsoring such a dialogue, it will have open up the endeavor to all shades of Zionist thought. Certainly this situation prevailed in the initial dialogue in New York city. Particularly important in this regard is the inclusion of those in Israel today who are central to the debate about the future of Zionism. The Zionist-Christian dialogue cannot be an exclusively American phenomenon with no exposure to the Israel and their impact on West Bank policies, for example that Menachem Kellner has summarized in the May 1986 issue of MODERN JUDAISM.

It is also vitally important that those of you who might come to such a dialogue from the Zionist side be prepared for a learning and clarifying experience as well. If you assume the stance that the sole purpose of the dialogue is to teach Christians about Zionism with little or nothing to learn from your side the effort will rapidly reach a dead-end. I do not claim any particular expertise on the question of Zionism. But I have tried to acquaint myself with a broad range of secular and religious writing on the question from the past and present. Without hesitation I am prepared to say that many unanswered questions seem to remain within Jewish circles about the meaning of Zionism. So do not be surprised if Christians with only minimal acquaintance with Zionist thought are frequently confused. You the Jewish community is not communicating an entirely clear message or even the basic definition of Zionism as yet. Certainly, the old ideological anti-Zionism found in the past in certain sectors of Reform Judaism is virtually dead. And I thought I was on fairly safe ground for awhile in asserting that the basic meaning of Zionism, now accepted by all Jews except a handful of extremists, could be encapsulated in statement, "Israel is central to the self-identity of the Jewish People", however varied in expression that self-identity might be from individual Jew to Jew. But intellectual encounters have left me no longer quite so certain that even this formula will work.

In the course of an inter-national conference on contemporary forms of antisemitism at Rutgers University some-time ago an Israeli professor from Hebrew University pounded on the table at one point in the discussion and said "Zionism is racism". Now he was not against the existence of the Israeli state. Far from it. Nor did he have any personal sympathy for the UN declaration. He just felt that Israel had to be a less ideologically-based state than most Zionists would have it. While I am fully aware that he by no means represents a majority, his viewpoint will need airing in any comprehensive dialogue on Zionism.

A somewhat related position was articulated in the Winter 1985 issue of DISSENT magazine by Menachem Brinnker. While not as strident in tone and never implying racist analogies, Brinker believes that Zionism has outlived its usefulness. It has now become an obstacle to the solution of Israel's current dilemmas: He writes: "The Zionist movement had one simple goal: to bring a majority of the Jews to an independent state. Once this is done, the Zionist idea and the Zionist movement earn a place of honor--in history. The continued existence of a Zionist movement is on the way to becoming not only superfluous but harmful....The pressing issues of today are no longer issues for which Zionism has answers."

And Rabbi Joseph Glazer who chaired the first Zionist-Christian dialogue in New York described himself as being a non Zionist, though not an anti-Zionist. I was intrigued with the distinction and decided to pursue it with him after-

wards. His response was a somewhat cryptic one. A non-Zionist is a person who neither makes aliyah to Israel nor has any remorse about not having done so! This hardly resolved the lack of clarity in the term "non-Zionist". Does this remain a legitimate category? Glazer seems to think so and the ZOA invited him to chair its dialogue. Obviously this is the kind of issue that needs to be pursued at length.

I should also mention at this point the need eventually to incorporate the perspectives of Oriental Jewry into any ongoing dialogue. It is becoming increasingly clear that the Oriental Jewish communities will play an increasingly important role in defining the Israeli ethos (and hence of Zionism), even though historically they have not been part of part of the Zionist movement by and large.

And even longtime advocates of Zionism who remain questionably committed to its basic tenets have warned that many outstanding issues remain. David Polish, for example, wrote in the Winter 1984 issue of the JOURNAL OF REFORM JUDAISM that an imperative remains for Jews to continue to wrestle with the full implications of Israeli state sovereignty. The mere fact of such sovereignty has not answered all the relevant questions, especially in the religious sphere.

To complete the picture, a worthwhile goal for any Zionist-Christian dialogue would be the inclusion of some Arab representatives who are Israeli citizens. I am not suggesting this needs to be done immediately. But ultimately we cannot

ignore the views of the indigenous Christians of Israel if we are to have a fully authentic Zionist-Christian dialogue. And when we get into broader issues of religious pluralism and state identification in Israel, as any dialogue about Zionism inevitably will at some point, the perspectives of Muslim citizens also require a hearing. For as Dr. Moshe Gabai, director of the Institute for Arabic Studies at Givat Haviva has said in a piece which appeared in a special issue of NEW OUTLOOK magazine (October/November 1984): "The cultural and social differentiation between Arabs and Jews has become institutionalized. To this very day there are no integrated or common frameworks . The basis of Arab identity, from the point of view of ethnic origin, language, religion and nationalism, guarantees a separate Arab existence--the concentration of Arab populations in specific territorial enclaves and separate institutions such as schools, media and voluntary organizations. All this hinders the creation of an overall Israeli culture and identity, and common social frameworks,"

Now many of you may not agree with Dr. Gabai's call for an "over-all Israeli culture and identity, and common social frameworks." But then we Christians must hear why. Without doubt his viewpoint has profound implications for Zionism and hence for any Christian-Zionist dialogue. This also holds true for some concrete steps taken in last few years by the Israeli government to further the integration of Arab citizens.

I think, for example, of the selection of an Arab citizen to kindle the official national lights for Independence Day, 1984. The overall significance of such a step for the meaning of Zionism and its relationship to the state has not been probed very much up till now.

One implication of what I have said thus far, and it may already be obvious to you, is that I would be strongly opposed to focusing the Zionist-Christian dialogue exclusively on theologians and biblical scholars. We shall need to include social ethicists and Christians with expertise in political science and political philosophy. For the people taking the lead in the rethinking of Zionism today, particularly in Israel, are by and large not from the theological or biblical disciplines, but from the social science broadly speaking. They will need Christian counterparts for the dialogue to succeed.

Thus, far, admittedly, I have rather neglected the specifically religious dimensions of the dialogue. To repeat, I consider them crucial. I have refrained from focusing on them initially to emphasize the point that Zionist-Christian dialogue cannot zero in on them alone without distorting the actual state of the Zionist discussion in Jewish circles today.

As we examine Jewish tradition, we surely will discover that in the history of few other religious peoples has the land been so intimately interwoven with the dreams, faith and hope

captured in the tradition. The vision of the land, the dream of return, of the in-gathering of the exiles, helped the Jewish people survive for 1900 years without a land of their own. This longing for the land was expressed each year in the closing prayer of the Passover Seder, "Next year in Jerusalem." No person or group can survive long without hope. And Jewish hope found its strength in the quest for life again in Eretz Israel, a quest inspired by the faith outlook of Psalm 147: "The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem, dispersed of Israel he gathers. He heals the broken-hearted, he binds up their wounds." The work of the late Jewish master teacher Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, ISRAEL: AN ECHO OF ETERNITY, sums up this feeling for the land, this almost mystical meaning that Israel and its heart, the city of Jerusalem, still holds for most of contemporary Jewry: "Jerusalem is more than a place in space...a memorial to the past. Jerusalem is a prelude, an anticipation of days to come...It is not our memory, our past that ties us to the land. It is our future... Spiritually, I am a native of Jerusalem. I have prayed here all my life. My hopes have their home in these hills...Jerusalem is never at the end of the road. She is the city where waiting for God was born."

And the noted historian of religion, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky underscores Heschel's point about the virtual interchangeability of Zion and Jerusalem and the deep-seated place both occupy in the Jewish consciousness. He writes: "The meaning of

Jerusalem as it subsequently determined Jewish self-understanding and historic consciousness is spelled out in the prophets and in the book of Psalms. Jerusalem and Zion are synonymous, and they came to mean not only the city, but the land as a whole and the Jewish People (viz. its remnant) as a whole." ("The Meaning of Jerusalem to Jews, Christians and Muslimes," The Charles Strong Memorial Lecture (Australia), 1972, reprinted from JAARBERICHT EX ORIENT LUX, 23: 1973-74).

Christian appreciation of this deep Jewish attachment to the land of Israel as the basis of Zionism must be an early part of any Zionist-Christian dialogue. It is a basic realization which, if not present on the part of the Christian participants in such a dialogue to recognize that the role of the land may indeed be one of the fundamental differences between the self-definition of Christians and Jews. (I have so argued in my volume CHRIST IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHRISTIAN-JEWISH DIALOGUE, though not all my Christian colleagues would agree with me on this point. As I see it, however, even though Christian faith must be deeply rooted in history (is is not anti-land), and even though Christianity may consider Jerusalem and Israel of special significance, ultimately every land is as holy as Jerusalem for the Christian in light of theology of the Incarnation. Therefore, one cannot speak of a "diaspora Christianity" in the same way as one can speak of a "diaspora Judaism.") Nevertheless, a useful, mutually

enriching discussion can result from an interchange between the Christian viewpoint and that mystical attachment to Jerusalem and Zion as a special place of salvation articulated by Heschel and Werblowsky.

An equally profitable discussion will result if the dialogue turns its attention to a comparison of Jewish attempts to relate the spiritual vision of Zion to the problems of a multi-ethnic state with the way in which Western Christian churches have solved the problem under the strong influence of the spirit of the Enlightenment. The perspectives presented by the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Liberty, and especially by its mastercraftsman Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J., in his own writings need to be compared with Zionist perspectives religious and secular. Many Christians in the West will no doubt feel uncomfortable with the seeming overidentification of state and religious vision in the writings of Heschel, Werblowsky and others like them. On the other hand, an encounter with Zionism will challenge many of the assumptions of those of us who basically identify the church-state separation model as the ideal for Catholic theology and not merely as pragmatic accommodation. Moreover, in light of events such as the Holocaust we in the West need to confront some serious questions about the role of religious symbols in our own general cultural ethos. There is danger that we may limit religion far too much to the sphere of the individual, allowing the public realm to be stripped bare of any sense of transcendence.

And if that happens, can personal religious commitment survive? (I suspect that in many ways Muslims are in principle much more sympathetic to the vision of religious Zionism than are most Western Christians. I doubt that either Israel or many of the Islamic states will ever adopt in full the Enlightenment answer to the dilemma of religion and the state that has found favor in the West and is espoused by such Israelis as Brinker.

Both Jacob Agus and Manfred Vogel interpret the theological meaning of Zionism primarily in terms of vocation and mission. Possession of the land enables the Jewish People to fulfill its divine vocation of bringing the knowledge and love of the one true God to the world. So Zion, though vital, is a secondary religious category for them. Their discussion will certainly open a discussion as to whether Christians need state sovereignty somewhere in order to fulfill their religious mission. It is a question we have not had to face since Constantine, but it may be on the horizon again. The Zionist-Christian dialogue will force the Christian participants to grapple seriously with the historical side of their religious tradition as they come face to face with Judaism's sense of salvation in a communal and historical context).

Another question that will inevitably arise in the context of the Zionist-Christian dialogue is that of power.

Irving Greenberg has devoted significant attention to this dimension of religious Judaism brought on by the re-emergence of the state of Israel. This is not a question, however, that Jews have had the opportunity to confront until the rise of the Zionist movement. Christians with a far longer track record here, may be able to share some useful insights with their Jewish dialogue partners in this most central of issues.

Finally, the Zionist mystical tradition with regard to land will put Christians in touch with the Jewish sense of the sacramentality of the earth. This contact will help the churches overcome their frequently negative attitudes toward "the earthly city". As some scholars have shown, many of the insights of a person such as Rav Kook, one of the modern giants in Jewish mystical thought, stand in close similarity to those advanced by a Christian like Fr. Teilhard de Chardin who devoted his life to trying to restore dignity to the realm of the earth.

From the above analysis, it should be clear that the exclusion of Zionism from the Jewish-Christian dialogue agenda seriously impoverishes the encounter. If Christians continue to insist on such an exclusion, they are in fact asking for dialogue with an emaciated form of Judaism and depriving themselves of a deeply enriching confrontation with their own faith perspective. Dr. Ruether, are you listening?

My profound gratitude to the officers of the Zionist Organization of America for giving me the opportunity to share these reflections with you this morning. My blunt talk is merely the reflection of how important I consider the establishment of a serious, sustained and comprehensive Zionist-Christian dialogue to be.