



# **When the Church talks about Israel**

A discussion in three parts

Egbert Egberts

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<sup>1</sup>On August 6 2024, Dr Matthew Tsakanikas, professor of theology at [Christendom College](#) in Virginia (USA) gave an interview to [Crisis Magazine](#) that was reproduced on [LifeSiteNews](#) in two articles. The first, under the title “Zionism is incompatible with Christianity: here’s why” by Tsakanikas, the second under the title “Christendom College theology professor explains why religious Zionism is ‘anti-Christ’” by Patrick Delaney on the basis of an [interview](#) with Eric Sammons.

My aim is not simply polemical. As a matter of fact, I was rather pleased to read a biblical defense of the catholic position on Israel on a website I have come to appreciate. We live in a world under attack that is travelling fast to the final showdown between the coming Antichrist and Christ who will defeat him. This rush head on to the end has particularly materialized in recent years through five events: the planned Covid pandemic and its vaccine scandal still under progress, the scam around climate warming, the war in Ukraine, the LGBT onslaught and the war against Israel, with abortion as the long term undercurrent of a society falling apart. I found it sad and disturbing that a site like *LifeSiteNews* toed the line of the mainstream media and politicians on Israel while being so clairvoyant on the other issues. I felt I had to take the time to analyze the arguments.

My first article is above all a reply to the biblical arguments proposed by Matthew Tsakanikas. As the second article is more of an overview, I will deal in my answer with those statements I found particularly provoking. I have chosen 13 statements that seem rather problematic and refute these, without too much repetition of my first article. I will then follow and finish with a reaction to the study by Benedict XVI, “Grace and Vocation without Remorse” quoted by Tsakanikas.

*If* God is at work in the present history of the Middle East and *if* the return of the Jews to their homeland is *at least* a sign that what has been foretold by the prophets of Israel, both in the Old

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<sup>1</sup> This series of articles is also available in French.

and New Testaments is coming back center stage, studying and debating these issues is of great importance. Jesus said, in the context of His teaching about the end times, that we had to watch so as not to be taken by surprise as the end of all things comes upon us.

The historic position of catholic theology, which is also, in part, the position of a number of protestant theologians, is not the only way of interpreting Scripture, even if the catholic Church has never shown much openness to debate the issue. Now that the Tsakanikas articles have appeared and Scripture has moved somewhat more to the heart of the question even within the catholic Church, it can hardly be surprising that protestant and evangelical theologians start analyzing his approach.

All Scripture references are from the New International Version, unless otherwise stated.

# When the Church talks about Israel – 1

Egbert Egberts

## Zionism is incompatible with Christianity: a reply

In recent times, we have been pleasantly surprised to discover members of the Catholic clergy defending a biblical faith on current issues, even publicly distancing themselves from the Bishop of Rome and even going to the point of accusing him of heresy. The more our world rebels against the God of the Bible, the more their opposition to that same world warms our hearts. But one current issue is sadly absent from this movement towards a position more in accordance with the Bible. It is the attitude towards Israel. Why this rejection of any *prophetic* perspective concerning Israel? This is not a small issue on the margins of the Christian faith. No, the clash is head-on! For the Catholic Church, “Christian Zionism” is a heresy, a betrayal of Christ that leads to apostasy. Clearly, the ecumenical love of the Church of Rome finds here one of its absolute limits, reflecting its antipathy towards the Jews who returned to the Holy Land to reestablish ancient Israel and towards the “evangelical fundamentalists” who support them. In the context of the apocalyptic times that are opening up before our feet, this absolute and total opposition to any whiff of Zionism, Jewish or Christian, is far from innocent.

In his article, Dr. Matthew A. Tsakanikas develops his thinking on what is the Catholic doctrine on Israel. It is therefore an excellent opportunity to try to understand the reasons behind this theological position, which is also found with variations in the Protestant world, and to evaluate it in the light of the Word of God.

Before going further, it is not useless to define what we mean by “Christian Zionism.” It is the conviction that God always has a plan with the people of Israel and that this plan reserves a place for the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. On the other hand, this does not imply either an automatic agreement with any policy of the State of Israel, or a Jewish inculturation in Christian worship. The almost 2000 years of persecution of the Jews, too often by so-called “Christian” countries, have left deep marks on the Jewish soul, making any mission of witness to the people of Israel so much more difficult. If we want to be audible to the ears of this people, we Christians must begin by loving this people “for their fathers’ sake”, Romans 11.28. “Christian Zionism” is both a reaction against a certain Christian theology that saw the people of Israel as having been replaced by the Church, and a recognition that, by the return to the land of Israel, God was clearly showing that he at least had not finished with his people.

### **When Rome is confronted with Jerusalem**

Let us begin by understanding Catholic teaching on this issue. Here is a quick summary of the classical Catholic position in the words of Tsakanikas: “For orthodox<sup>2</sup> Christians, in no way can the establishment of a modern State of Israel be confused with the fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham because Jesus is the true fulfillment of those promises. To say otherwise would be akin to heresy, the denial of a doctrine. It would deny Jesus fulfilled the Law [Torah] and the Prophets.” The Church is willing, at a pinch, to recognize a secular Zionist state. But “a Jewish faith-state [Glaubenstaat] that would view itself as the theological and political fulfillment of the promises [given to Abraham]—is unthinkable within history according to Christian faith and contrary to the Christian understanding of the promises [given to Abraham about the Land].”<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Vatican was

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<sup>2</sup> Meant are Christians faithful to catholic orthodoxy. EE

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, “Grace and Vocation without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*,” trans. Nick Healy, Jr., in *Communio: International*

taken by surprise by developments in Zionism. “But religious forces were also always at work in Zionism, and to the surprise of agnostic fathers [of the original Zionism], a devotion to religion has often arisen in the new generation.” Yet Rome seems much more at ease with agnostic Jews than with believing Jews when it comes to a faith linked to the land of Israel which, moreover, claims Jerusalem as its indivisible national capital. And when some Jews start talking about rebuilding the temple, it is time to dot the i's.<sup>4</sup>

The temple had been destroyed “irrevocably.” “God clearly never intended a Third Temple on earth to be built. Christianity has become the fulfillment of the Sinai Covenant.” “Since an earthly Temple is no longer wanted by God, then religious grounds for claims of a physical Land are also obsolete since the Messiah became the Temple and sign of the Land..” “There is not one covenant for the Jews and another for Christians. Jesus brought the Old Law, civil and ceremonial, to God’s true goal.” “Christians are not required and should not support any form of Zionism which ignores two thousand years of advancement in law and worship or supplants Christian morals.” “Christianity was God’s original intention, and that is why it was last in God’s plan. What is first in intention is last in execution.”

“Too many Christians, especially evangelical fundamentalists, falsely pretend that the return of Jews to their ancestral homeland is part of a messianic fulfillment. Such false prophecy and false doctrine uses God’s name in vain for illegal settlements and activity.” God has a different plan. “A physical Land for a specific people was never the ultimate end or goal [*telos*] of God’s promises but only the beginning of a plan for a future and ultimate Israel.”

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*Catholic Review*, Vol. 45 (Spring 2018), 163-184, at 178. Digital PDF.  
[https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1 Benedict XVI.pdf](https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1_Benedict_XVI.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> To be clear, I believe in the reconstruction of the Temple as and when the Messiah will have returned, according to Ezekiel 40-48. A temple rebuilt by members of the Jewish people before that cannot be identified to that Messianic Temple. EE

The author explains it this way: The first two promises, of a land to Abraham and of a dynasty to David, were only points A and B of God's plan. But God's goal was point C, *spiritual* fulfillment. "Possessing God is much greater than possessing a physical land, so the physical land is no longer relevant." This is why God allowed the Second Temple to be removed with the generation that rejected Jesus the Messiah and to teach the original tenants (Matthew 21:41) of the Land to stop clinging to the Old Law in too literal an understanding." This would amount to going back to point A or point B, "but the spiritual purposes and ends were always the more important part of the promises." [I]t is not the spiritual which is first [in execution] but the physical, and then the spiritual [which was first in intention]" (1 Corinthians 15:46). "Christians are not wise to support forms of Zionism which pretend that a return of modern peoples<sup>5</sup> to the former geographical territory of the Amorites, Canaanites, and Philistines, and ancient Israel or Judah is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham or Israel. No doubt it fulfills something, maybe even the warning of a falling away from Christ or denial of Christ by those holding a false Zionism."

St. John of the Cross wrote this: "Let us suppose that a holy man is greatly afflicted because his enemies persecute him, and that God answers him, saying: I will deliver thee from all thine enemies. This prophecy may be very true, yet, notwithstanding, his enemies may succeed in prevailing, and he may die at their hands. And so if a man should understand this after a temporal manner he would be deceived." "And thus Abraham was deceived by the way in which he himself had understood the prophecy..."

"All the promises of God are only realized in the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He is not replacing anything because He was always the true goal (*telos*) of the Law and Prophets. He is fulfilling and realizing all of God's intentions for humanity. The promises of Genesis 12:1-3 are brought to completion [*telos*] in Christ and His Mystical Body which was always God's plan (cf.

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<sup>5</sup> We take note of the strange plural.



Ephesians 1:3-10). This means Jesus is the true promised Land meant for Jews and Greeks. We witness not a *supersessionism*, or a replacement of the Jews, but rather a reconstituting of Israel by which all nations have access to the covenant. It is the fulfillment of God's promises that ancient Israel existed as the first-born son in order to gather all the nations in God's matured Israel of the Messiah—Israel reconstituted.”

“Taking God's promises to Abraham too literally and in rejection of Jesus Christ is actually now a rejection of God. It ignores the magnitude of 2,000 years. It is against God's revealed Messiah, and so it is rightly called *anti-Christ*. Misunderstanding of God's promises has misled some Zionists to believe they have the right to drive people off the land which God has since given to the Gentiles (cf. Matthew 21:41-43; Luke 21:24). According to modern and international law, no one has the right to drive anyone off their land. Herein is the magnitude of the problem with modern Zionism. God gave the physical geography of Jerusalem to other tenants (Matthew 21:41-43) as part of God's positive will to draw humanity to God's Messiah instead of an earthly temple.”

“God's Messiah is clear that the former “Holy Land” will be trodden by the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) until all members of the Mystical Body of Christ (the true Holy Land) are incorporated—until Jew and Gentile (including people from all religions) have accepted Jesus and His Mystical Body reaches completion.”

The arguments and conclusions presented by Tsakanikas are a mixture of biblical and theological reflections, sometimes derived from a rather biased reading of Scripture, from certain teachings of the “saints” and from modern political reasons. To answer them, I will pose three questions:

What has been fulfilled?

Has the spiritual *already* replaced the earthly?

How should we understand the present nation of Israel?

## What has been fulfilled?

Curiously, the author is most relevant there where he strays the furthest from Scripture. Right at the beginning of the article, the abstract states (my italics): “For orthodox Christians, in no way can the establishment of a modern State of Israel be confused with the *fulfillment* of the promises given to Abraham because Jesus is the true *fulfillment* of those promises.” To maintain that the present State of Israel is a *fulfillment* of prophecy “would be to deny that Jesus *fulfilled* the Law [Torah] and the Prophets.” And again: “Christianity had become the *fulfillment* of the Sinai Covenant (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) through the blood of the Messiah.” “It is abundantly clear that we must understand God’s promises more and more spiritually as God begins to *fulfill* them.” One form or another of the word fulfill appears 25 times in the article.

“All the promises of God are only realized in the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.” One can only approve. “Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes,” says Paul in Romans 10:4. There is no future outside Christ. Everything passes through him and everything ends in him. There is therefore no messianic future for Israel, for the Church or for the world outside Christ. Coming to him, believing in him, giving one’s life to him is the *sine qua non* condition of any participation in this future. Although the phrase “Jesus is the true fulfillment of these promises” sums up this teaching of the Scriptures very well, the conclusion that the author draws from it is less fortunate. Because in no way does a *temporal* messianic future undermine this conclusion. It would practically amount to dictating God’s conduct!

When the author says that having God is much greater than having a physical land, and that therefore physical land is no longer relevant, he commits a logical error. There is no causal connection between those two sentences. To be true, both would have to be founded in Scripture. And they are not. Add to that: “This is why God allowed the Second Temple to be removed with the generation that rejected Jesus the Messiah ...”, he adds

another error. The reason for the destruction of the temple was clearly given by Jesus, and it is *not* to show that the land of Israel no longer has any future. On the contrary, it is precisely Scripture that founds the earthly future of Israel, I will come back to this later. But to conclude like he does is imperative if one wants to defend the current role of the Church (of Rome, of course, for the author) as the new Israel. When he speaks of the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12.1-3, Tsakanikas concludes that they “are brought to completion [*telos*] in Christ and in His Mystical Body which was always God’s plan (cf. Ephesians 1.3-10).” The accomplishment is thus not limited to Christ, but to Christ *and his Church* which to him is Rome. The true promised land “is about completion of the Mystical Body of Christ, not the physical land which will be “trodden under the feet of the Gentiles” until the Second Coming. Israel is reconstituted in Christ’s Mystical Body..” He can taste in it “two thousand years of advancement in law and worship.” But surely, he forgets a little too quickly to what extent this Church has for centuries been the principal persecutor of Israel! It has touched and continues to touch this people whom God declares to be the apple of his eye, Zechariah 12.8. In order to appreciate that this Church is the new holy land, should we not have found a little more sympathy and love there?

Yes, Jesus embodies the fulfillment of the law and concentrates in his Person the realization of all the messianic prophecies. But not in the sense that his coming, his death, his resurrection and his ascension have accomplished everything and that therefore there cannot be an earthly future in which Israel plays a leading role. The biblical meaning of “It is accomplished!” is that from now on, access to forgiveness no longer depends on sacrifices. Looking towards the future, the people of Israel will be saved when they recognize the Messiah at his return, as Zechariah prophesies:

On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on

me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. (12.9-11)

The fulfillment in Jesus of all the prophecies clearly contains chapters that concern times beyond his ascension. Jesus himself says so in Luke 21.22: “For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.”

Psalm 2 is the first messianic psalm of the Psalter. It is quoted by the apostles in Acts 4, who indicate its literal fulfillment. Psalm 2 verses 7 to 9 read:

I will proclaim the LORD’s decree: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron ; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

This text is quoted in the New Testament, according to the translation of the Septuagint (LXX), in Revelation 2.26,27, 12.5 and 19.15:

To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’ —just as I have received authority from my Father.

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty..

When did he shepherd the nations? When did these disciples do it? Tsakanikas quotes John of the Cross who interprets this text in the following way: “Herein God speaks of the principal and perfect dominion, which is eternal dominion; and it was in this sense that it was fulfilled, and not in the less important sense, which was temporal, and which was not fulfilled in Christ during any part of His temporal life.” Thus, since it was not

accomplished during the life of Jesus, it must carry a non-temporal sense. But this reasoning is false. It excludes authoritatively (but whose authority?) a future temporal accomplishment. When a prophecy has not yet been accomplished, we cannot conclude that therefore everything must be spiritualized! A time will come when the prophecy of Psalm 2 will be fulfilled to the letter. The quotations from this text in Revelation encourage us precisely to expect that. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. Clearly, some 35 years after his death, there were still prophecies that needed to be fulfilled. So not everything was fulfilled before his ascension. Similarly, after his resurrection, in Luke 24:21, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus had a very earthly expectation of a Messiah who would deliver Israel. Their disappointment vanished when they realized that Jesus had really risen. Did that completely change their expectation, or only its calendar? In Acts 1:6,7, the disciples are with Jesus, probably on the very day of the ascension. What is their expectation?

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

Note Jesus' answer. He does not correct their literal, down-to-earth expectation. He does not say that, from now on, everything shifts into a spiritual understanding. He reacts to the calendar without questioning the literal accomplishment. He entrusts them with his mission by leaving the question of the reign of Israel to rest for the time being. There are of course a number of future accomplishments of prophecies that touch on the earthly future of the nation of Israel. In fact, there are a great many texts in the prophets that speak of the messianic future for the people of Israel. One of the best known is this text from Isaiah 9:5,6:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on

David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

We can easily understand why this text is read at Christmas. In the guise of the newborn Child, we can easily discern the Son to be born in Bethlehem. However, the rest of the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. It could be spiritualized, but even then we do not really discern in what sense sovereignty and peace have increased for the throne of *David*. One may have thought that this was the announcement of the Church, but who would dare to see the throne of David *there*? The "throne of Saint Peter" is really not the same thing! In other words, the accomplishment is still waiting. What is it waiting for? A future for Israel?

Jeremiah discerns this happy time. In 23.3-8, he writes:

"I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior. "So then, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when people will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' Then they will live in their own land."

Could this text be about Christians? But they were never banished by God! There just is no sense in bringing them from the land of the north. The righteous Branch is clearly Jesus. But he does not yet reign in the sense the prophet means. It is not a spiritual reign since it is manifested by the gathering of the Israelites, a literal gathering for which Tsakanikas has no place! For him, the reign of David that the Messiah accomplishes must

be spiritual, no matter what the texts say. But Jeremiah says that they will live on their territory. Which one?

Tsakanikas quotes a passage from Saint John of the Cross to prove how completely mistaken one can be in waiting for the accomplishment of what has been promised. Jeremiah writes, 4.10; “Then I said, “Alas, Sovereign LORD! How completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, ‘You will have peace,’ when the sword is at our throats!” John of the Cross adds: “For the peace that God promised them was that which was to be made between God and man by means of the Messiah Whom He was to send them, whereas they understood it of temporal peace; and therefore, when they suffered wars and trials, they thought that God was deceiving them, because there befell them the contrary of that which they expected...” They therefore did not understand that the promise was not to be understood literally.

However, this is not at all what is happening here! The exegesis of John of the Cross is totally erroneous. It was not God who promised them peace, but the false prophets. Jeremiah takes up their words, initially without perhaps questioning the origin of their message. They said they were speaking on behalf of God. But Jeremiah returns to their prophecies a little later: In 6.14, he says: “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.”. In 14.13: “But I said, “Alas, Sovereign LORD! The prophets keep telling them, ‘You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.” Thus, John of the Cross’s argument fails. But this becomes the ground for saying that all this will serve as an example concerning Abraham’s expectation in Genesis. He too understood a spiritual promise in a literal sense. The author says:

“Since God no longer wants an earthly Temple, the religious grounds for claiming a physical Land are also obsolete since the Messiah has become the Temple and sign of the Land.” “A physical land for a specific people was never the end or ultimate goal

[*telos*] of God's promises, but only the beginning of a plan for a future and ultimate Israel." But on what authority can one say this? It goes against the entire Old Testament. It comes close to saying that God unfortunately could not have expressed himself more clearly and that, from the beginning, his people understood nothing. Referring to the apostle Paul, he proposes that "the goal of Israel was always to become a member of the Jerusalem above and not simply the one below." This is both true and false. Abraham understood the temporal content of the promise, a people and a land, but *at the same time* he looked forward to the city to come:

People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:14-16)

When we fail to hold together the temporal vocation of Israel and the spiritual reality behind and above, as Stephen does in his preaching in Acts 7, we demonstrate to what extent we are riding with our nose on the handlebars, without being able to step back enough to hold these two realities together. Such is the problem behind Tsakanikas' reasoning:

"The first two promises of Land/Nation and Name/Dynasty are points on the road and inseparable for arriving at the promised Messiah. They were just points A and B on the road to the final destination of "point C." Upon arriving at "point C," the Land and Dynasty are no longer essential and have served their purpose."

May I suggest that the reasoning is too simple? The Messiah has come, he says, *thus* "point C" is reached. End of story... for Israel. Now the Messiah reigns and his Church expands. Israel's calling is fulfilled and thus has come to its end. "...God fulfilled His true promise of getting everyone to "point C." So long as "point C" remains, then points A and B are always being fulfilled



by God ...” The consequence? There is nothing more to accomplish.

He needs more perspective. Who says that “point C” is located in a past now two thousand years old? What if “point C” were located instead in a messianic future of which Christmas is only the first act, but which, through the death of Jesus, His resurrection, ascension and return, extends to the completion of which the apostle speaks in 1 Corinthians 15.24-26:

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

When is “then”? Paul seems to be at pains to show that this so-called “point C” lies at the end of the process the incarnation started. The end, *telos*, will come when He gives the Kingdom back into His Father’s hands, see also verse 28. Again in verse 54: When immortality will have swept mortality into the past, then, *tote*, all will finally come true and all will be fulfilled. Does that mean that the apostle has a low view of Golgotha and the empty tomb? Of course not! But in salvation history, although it is the summit, it isn’t the end, the *telos*. The victory of Golgotha will penetrate all of history, all of what is and will be until God will be all in all. Have we already arrived there? Of course not. As yet, not all his enemies have been put under his feet. In particular, one could mention that the infernal triad of the end, the Dragon, the Beast and the false prophet, is still missing. And what about death as the *last* enemy? Yes, thanks to Christ, he is a defeated enemy. But he is still a very present enemy. Revelation 20.13,14 tells at what point death will be over and done with: “...death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.” *Then*, and only then, to use Tsakanikas’ language, will “point C”, the *telos*, be reached. Then, the last enemy will be destroyed. Then all prophecy will be fulfilled.

The author's conclusions suffer from myopia, and I have the impression that he has accommodated himself rather well to it. Why does he not want to know anything about a future for Israel beyond the death of Christ? And what if the theological reason at the surface actually hides a deeper reason? This brings me to the following question.

### **Has the spiritual *already* replaced the earthly?**

The author quotes 1 Corinthians 15.46:

The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.

Paul is talking here about the physical resurrection. The 'natural' in this sentence is our natural body and the 'spiritual' our resurrected body. Paul is therefore not talking at all about Israel and applying this conclusion to Israel is rather problematic! But let's play along and pretend.

*If* the spiritual has replaced the earthly since the time of the coming of Christ, seeking a temporal future for Israel would be nonsense. If that were so, we can also understand the author's following sentence: "Possessing God is much greater than possessing a physical land, so the physical land is no longer relevant." Note that the author makes a logical error here: the conclusion of the impertinence of the land is neither the logical nor the obligatory result of his first thesis. To make it clear, imagine replacing the possession of the land with another physical thing: eating and drinking. Possessing God is much greater than eating and drinking, so eating and drinking are no longer relevant! The lack of logic is obvious. But let's move on. We *must* then conclude that the same thing also applies to the Church. If the spiritual has replaced the earthly, the Church's vocation is *therefore* to be poor in earthly goods... Now, it is well known that the Church is anything but poor. Its real estate wealth is glaring. Its treasures are overflowing. And no pope seems to have felt any discomfort from it, except, perhaps, John Paul I. Could this be

the reason for the abrupt end of his pontificate? The rumor is persistent...

There evidently is a great contradiction between what the Church demands of Israel and what it accepts, even demands, without blinking, for itself. How is it possible to demand the status of a faith-state for the Vatican while refusing it for Israel? Why this double standard? Could it be, by any chance, because the Vatican wants to own and/or manage the (old) city of Jerusalem, deceitfully called East Jerusalem so that no one notices the deception?

Now if owning God is greater than anything, must we then conclude that the Church does in fact not “own God”? Is this Church that would expropriate Israel and that does not want to lose any of its own guilty opulence, nor apply its own rhetoric to itself, is it thus giving a public testimony to its spiritual dearth?

The author writes: “Christians are not required and should not support any form of Zionism which ignores two thousand years of advancement in law and worship.” Although the author later invokes international law, this is not what he is talking about here. The international law invoked to attack Israel is far too recent to dare speak of “two thousand years.” It must therefore be two thousand years of canon law and Catholic worship. Does he mean that Zionist Christians, and perhaps also Zionist Jews, are therefore guiltily ignorant of these two thousand years of Catholic evolution? But these two thousand years were filled with what? With the inquisition and the intolerable persecution of Jews, heretical Catholics and Protestants, with the burnings at the stake, the live-burials, the destruction and theft of property, with wars waged by the popes of Rome, etc. And this should *inspire* us? But with what if not the greatest disgust? Far be it from me to fall into simple anti-papist language! That is not the point! But here a catholic theologian wants to convince us with the argument that Catholic history should inspire us with respect, filial love and intellectual submission! That is really too much to ask!

Tsakanikas further writes: “Taking God’s promises to Abraham too literally and in rejection of Jesus Christ is actually now a rejection of God. It ignores the magnitude of 2,000 years. It is against God’s revealed Messiah, and so it is rightly called *anti-Christ*.”

Isn’t that rather shocking? Here is a Christian accusing other Christians of playing the role of the antichrist. And why? I hope we agree that it would take a very serious reason to justify such an insinuation. That someone could suggest this about Hitler would be understandable. But here is the reason the author gives: “Taking God’s promises to Abraham too literally” and rejecting Jesus Christ in this way. Too literally? So taking God at his Word would amount to being opposed to God? And contradicting God would now, miraculously, be proof that one is on his side?

It is hardly possible here to cite all the biblical texts that go against what the author asserts. I will therefore limit myself to just a few:

The whole of Jeremiah 31 seems to prove Tsakanikas wrong. Here God communicates to and through Jeremiah how He will deal with the people of Israel in the future. At the beginning of this chapter, one could argue that he is simply talking about the return from the Babylonian captivity a few decades later. But the details do not correspond to such an interpretation. For example, in verses 8 and 9, the return concerns Ephraim. But Ephraim did not return in the time of Zerubbabel. He still has not returned even today. Ephraim is mentioned again in verses 18 to 20. However, this is not Jeremiah’s way of speaking of the people. His people is Judah, mentioned in verses 23 and 24. Now, if the return of Ephraim is still future, that means that Jeremiah speaks in this chapter of another return, still to come. A physical return: “to their own land”, 17, “in the land of Judah and in its towns”, 23. The house of Israel and the house of Judah (two distinct houses, as in Ezekiel 37.15ff) will be sown with an offspring of men, 27.

Yes, says the Church, but the new covenant announced in 31-34 makes it clear that this people is henceforth the Church from the Jews and the pagans! Not quite. That would be going a little bit fast. This covenant is concluded with whom? With the house of Israel and the house of Judah, cf. Ezekiel 37:26 which describes the outcome of the future reunion of Ephraim and Judah under the reign of a future Davidic king. Is this fulfilled in the Messiah? Certainly. In fact, it *began* to be fulfilled fifty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter addressed the entire people of Israel who came from the Diaspora to the four corners of the horizon of the ancient world and of whom 3,000 accepted the Gospel of the Messiah on that same day. So, the first fulfillment concerns the Jewish people. Ezekiel 36:25-27 seems to announce the same thing that Jeremiah writes. But what precedes and what follows does not entirely agree with it. Here are verses 24 to 29:

<sup>24</sup>For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.

<sup>25-27</sup>I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

<sup>28-29</sup>Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for grain and multiply it; I will send famine no more upon you.

Of whom can this be said? Who will be brought back “into your own land”? On whom will God send famine no more? What ruins will be rebuilt, 33? What land was a desolation, 34? What nations around the people have recognized that the Lord has rebuilt the cities and the land that were in ruins, 36?

Is Jeremiah therefore necessarily speaking only of Pentecost, or is Pentecost a *first* fulfillment of these words? This seems more in keeping with the following, Jeremiah 31:35-37:

This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD Almighty is his name: “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the LORD, “will Israel ever cease being a nation before me.” This is what the LORD says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the LORD.

Let us ask a question as simple as it is essential: Has the seed of Israel ceased forever to be a nation before the Lord? That is the conclusion to be drawn from the argument of Tsakanikas and many others like him. But it is wrong, isn't it? The sun, moon, and stars still shine in the firmament. The laws of nature are still in force. And then, look at the last line: “because of all that they have done.” What God said was *not* annulled by the crucifixion of the Son of God by Israel. “All” in this sentence is commensurate with God's omniscience. The blood of Christ *did* fall upon the Jewish people, as Matthew 27:25 clearly implies. The horrors of 70 A.D. were the terrible consequence. But these awful things did not annul God's affirmation in Jeremiah 31:35-37. The apostle Paul clearly had the same understanding in Romans 11:11-27.

Take the list of curses in Leviticus 26:14-39. They were fulfilled to the letter. And the restoration would not be fulfilled literally? Look at the end of that chapter, 26:44,45:

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD.

Should we not fear the wrath of God if we leave all the curses announced to Israel while reserving all the blessings announced to ourselves? Should we not fear his wrath in using his holy Word to justify such a theft? Should we not fear his wrath in daring to call those who take his Word literally anti-Christ?

Should we not fear his wrath as we dare to replace or reconstitute (it is in fact the same thing) Israel by or in “the Church”? Quotation marks are required, because is such a Church still the Church of Jesus?

### **How should we understand the present nation of Israel?**

One final burning issue of today must be addressed: the right to the land of Israel and its consequences. As has already been quoted, Tsakanikas writes:

“Misunderstanding of God’s promises has misled some Zionists to believe they have the right to drive people off the land which God has since given to the Gentiles (cf. Matthew 21:41-43; Luke 21:24). According to modern and international law, no one has the right to drive anyone off their land. Herein is the magnitude of the problem with modern Zionism. God gave the physical geography of Jerusalem to other tenants (Matthew 21:41-43) as part of God’s positive will to draw humanity to God’s Messiah instead of an earthly temple.”

“Unarmed women and children and innocent men are being murdered because of a false Zionist mentality. Innocent civilians are willfully slaughtered, as testified to by Catholic bishops, hospital surgeons, and Israeli soldiers. On July 19, 2024, the U.N. International Court of Justice ruled against illegal Jewish settlements. No doubt, members of Islamic groups are guilty of crimes and Israeli citizens have the right of self-defense in legally occupied territory. However, that does not give Zionists the right to exterminate innocent civilians on Church property..”

Here are the two Bible texts he quoted:

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’ ? “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken

away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. (Matthew 21:41-43)

They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)

What does Jesus say? That the *land* of Israel was *given* to the Gentiles? But Jesus doesn't say that! Even the prophecy in Isaiah 5 doesn't say that. Here is what Isaiah 5:7 says: "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in..." It is not the *land*, but the *nation*. That the judgment of the nation has consequences for the land is self-evident. But it is not the land that is the object of the prophecy. Jesus, likewise, does not speak of the land: "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." *The kingdom of God*. Not the land, not even just the people, but their place in the reign of God, the heart of his work in this world. In other words, one cannot conclude from these verses that there has been a change of title to the land. Trampled underfoot by the nations, yes. Given to those nations, no. The land will be judged according to Leviticus 26 and the good land will become a desolation, and that is exactly what has happened.

Descriptions of the Holy Land in the 17th and 19th centuries speak of a desolate and empty country, where mainly small groups of Jews and Christians survive. Adriani Relandi, *Palestina ex Monumentis Veteribus Illustrata*, Utrecht, Netherlands, 1716,<sup>6</sup> reporting his journey to the land of Israel in 1695, writes: The country is for the most part empty, abandoned, depopulated. The main population is in Jerusalem, Akko, Tsafat, Jaffa, Tiberias and Gaza. The majority of the population is Jewish, almost all the others are Christians. There are very few Muslims, mostly Bedouins. The only exception is Nablus (now Shekhem), where about 120 Muslims of the Natsha family and about 70

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<sup>6</sup> First part : <http://books.google.com/books?id=j5cUAAAAQAAJ...>, second part : <http://books.google.com/books?id=sZcUAAAAQAAJ...> Cf. aussi : <http://www.juif.org/le-mag/275,la-palestine-juive-au-xviiie-siecle.php>.



shomronim (Samaritans) lived. In Nazareth, the capital of Galilee, there were about 700 people - all Christians. In Jerusalem, about 5,000 people, almost all Jews and some Christians. Relandi mentions that there were about 550 people in Gaza, half of them Jews and half Christians.

In the 19th century, in 1867, the American author Mark Twain traveled through the country and his description matches Relandi's observations. In an article in the *Jerusalem Post*,<sup>7</sup> Tuly Weisz quotes Twain: "There is not a single village in its entire extent—for 30 miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent dwelling. One can ride ten miles on horseback, in the vicinity, without seeing ten human beings." ... "Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it hangs the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and stifled its energies." »

Further, the same author mentions another early visitor to Israel:

Six hundred years before Twain's visit, another famous visitor ... was struck by the desolation of Jerusalem. Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, known as Nahmanides (1194-1270), sailed from Christian Spain to the land of Israel. After a long and perilous journey, he arrived at the port of Acre before traveling to Jerusalem in 1267, where he failed to find even nine other Jews with whom to pray. He wrote to his son: "Many are the deserted places of Israel, and great is the desecration. The more sacred a place is, the greater is the devastation it has suffered. Jerusalem is the most desolate of all." Nevertheless, the sage, whose Torah commentary is still studied, had a most surprising interpretation of the desolation he encountered. He saw it as a blessing in disguise. Commenting on a verse in Leviticus that describes the curses that will befall the land of Israel, Nahmanides writes that the devastation "is good news, proclaiming that during all our exiles our land will not accept our enemies... Since the time we left it, [the land] has not accepted any nation or people, and all are trying to settle in it... This is a great proof and assurance for us." The 13th-century scholar wrote that Israel would remain desolate until the Jewish people took control. But

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/unto-the-nations-505760>.

when the people of Israel finally returned to the land of Israel, the region would once again prosper under divine providence. As the most famous eyewitness to the desolation of Palestine in the 19th century, Twain was an unwitting collaborator with Nahmanides.

Of course, all this has been ridiculed or “put into perspective” to remove its value as testimony, but these criticisms are devoid of credibility, as politically motivated as they are. But the unanimous testimony of these three historical visitors nevertheless remains. Tsakanikas is thus mistaken when he cites the Bible just as he is mistaken when he refers to history.

Does this justify everything he mentions about the conflict between Israel and “the Palestinians”? Probably not. But one must be very careful to verify what one asserts! The author invokes international law which does not authorize this or that. But Israel is founded in the defense of its country on this same international law. The author speaks of the land of Israel as “the ancient geographical territory of the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Philistines, and of ancient Israel or Judah.” But why has he so much trouble citing the historical right of the Jews to their land that he has to drown them among the peoples that *God* expelled from the land according to the same Bible that Tsakanikas cites in his article? He seems little enthusiastic about people checking out his conclusions in that same Bible. He prefers to refer people to the doctors of the Church. Is this safer ground than the Word of God? On the basis of which international law can he call colonies “illegal” when the same international law has attributed the land “from the river to the sea” to the Jewish people, as for example at the international conference in San Remo in 1920? Where in international law can we find the right to a Palestinian state? There has never been a Palestinian land in the law. There has never been a State of Palestine, hence my quotation marks at the beginning of this paragraph. It would have been so easy to verify...

And what about international law? When it comes to frontiers, these are most often recognized after events, particularly there where war has been provoked without valid reason. Look at the frontiers in eastern Europe after the second World War.

Does anyone still invoke international law against Russia's takeover of Königsberg, today's Kaliningrad? Will international law eventually recognize the takeover if the Crimea by Russia? Most probably. And will Israel's enemies go on about international law if tomorrow Israel should be evicted from the land? Most unlikely. International law is just another tool of war there where Israel is concerned.

War is raging in the Middle East and, like any war, horrors are being committed. But why does he talk exclusively about what he accuses Israel of? Why does he find it so difficult to mention the absolute horror of the October 7 pogrom? Why does he say nothing about the systematic policy of Hamas and Hezbollah of using the local Arab population as human shields, thereby knowingly causing the deaths of so many civilians? All he can manage to say is this pale sentence: "There is no doubt that members of Islamic groups are guilty of crimes and that Israeli citizens have the right to defend themselves on legally occupied territory." Yes, indescribable horrors have been committed by the "Palestinians." Yes, no doubt Israeli soldiers have committed horrors. That is war. This is a situation where hatred is systematically maintained by one side and has been so for at least a century. Unfortunately, this provokes unacceptable reactions. But if tomorrow, the so-called Palestinians decided to live in peace with their Jewish neighbors, the day after tomorrow peace would begin. But this never ending war cannot justify the inexcusable assertion that there is some equality in horror. And even if there were any equality, why not condemn even more strongly the Syrians, Jordanians and Lebanese who have perpetrated bloody crimes against these same Palestinians, even though they are just as Arab as they are? I wrote these words before the fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime in Syria and the discovery of the filthy mass graves with at least 100,000 corpses of Syrians tortured and starved to death by his regime. But this does not provoke any wave of protest... And if Israel were guilty of deliberate crimes against innocent people, why does it take so much trouble to warn the civilian population? And why does Hamas want nothing to do with the displacement of civilians to less risky places?

I don't know why professor Tsakanikas finished his article on such an accusatory note, lacking all balance. In the interview published after on *LifeSiteNews*, he comes back to that and I will react to it in the following article: "Thirteen Charges" which will concentrate on the main points of friction on the subject.

May I finish by mentioning my disappointment? I had hoped to read a more biblically balanced defense of why the Church is so negative about anything to do with Israel. The inevitable conclusion is that his interpretation of Scripture is insufficient. That is a great pity.

The other conclusion has probably to be that a *biblical* defense of the rejection of Israel by God simply is impossible. That should make one think, should it not?

## When the Church talks about Israel – 2

### Thirteen charges – a defense

Egbert Egberts

The second article on [LifeSiteNews](#) contained a resume of the [interview](#) with Professor Matthew Tsakanikas by Eric Sammons. As it lends itself better to a different approach, I have chosen to take thirteen affirmations sounding often as so many charges, and react to them. I have taken these affirmations in the order in which they appear in the interview.

All Scripture references are from the New International Version.

1. With Israel continuing its [genocidal rampage](#) against the people in Gaza, and now also the [West Bank](#), the topic of Zionism is being widely discussed since it is precisely this ideology which continues to provide a pretext and impetus for the Israeli state to violently expel the Palestinian people from the lands they have resided in for many centuries.

No, “Palestinians” have not resided in the land of Israel “for many centuries”. There are at least three unanimous witnesses to the Holy Land being virtually abandoned and empty for at least 600 years in between 1267 and 1867. I have given the details in my first article in the section “How to understand the present day nation of Israel”, pages 23-25 above.

In fact, the very word *Palestinian* is a misnomer. In the decades up to 1948, the Palestinians were the Jews and the Palestinian flag carried the shield of David. Tsakanikas is simply and uncritically following the rewriting of history.

The Arab inhabitants of Palestine/Israel were called Arabs up to 1968. The land of Israel is *without dispute* the historic homeland of the Jews. Jesus was a Jew born in Jewish Bethlehem. Jerusalem became the Israelite capital about 3000 years ago.



How else to understand the headlines of another day, like this one from *Le Soir* in Belgium on May 16 1948:

Arab troops invade Palestine. Fighting against whom? Against the Palestinians of 1948. See this picture taken

from the *Larousse* dictionary of 1939. Can you spot the Palestinian flag in the center?

If Arab armies fight against the inhabitants of Palestine in 1948, how can one maintain that today, self-invented Palestinians claim to have been Palestinians for centuries?



Where does the present use of the name come from? The idea came from the PR experts of the KGB of the former Soviet Union. The plan and the campaign were prepared and orchestrated by the State Institute of Oriental Studies whose leader was Yevgeny Primakov. He was a spy who had worked in different Arab countries posing as a journalist for the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*.

So the Soviet bloc media started to mourn the “poor Palestinians” and “the evil Jews who stole the country of these poor Palestinians”. The idea of the “poor Palestinians” was quickly taken up by the left-wing media, especially during the period of 1968, a period conducive to this kind of propaganda, and after

three years of media bombardment, the Egyptian Yasser Arafat gave an impassioned speech in European universities and at the UN explaining how he, a “Palestinian by origin” had seen his country stolen and humiliated by these “Khazar Jews”.

2. In 1947-48, this project began in earnest when Jewish forces compelled more than 700,000 Palestinians to flee for their lives abandoning their homes, lands, and livelihoods. The Zionist army then barred them from returning. These people, with their descendants, now make up more than 5.9 million [refugees](#) distributed in Gaza (70 percent of the overall population), Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank, with the right to return to their homeland recognized under international law.

This is, at best, a half-truth. Tsakanikas forgets to mention that most of these 700 000 Arabs moved out after having been asked to do so by the Arab leaders around the beginning of the war of independence in 1948. That some have been forced out by the Israeli authorities cannot hide the fact that most left for “inter-Arab” reasons. All this has been rather contested by a group of “New historians” like Benny Morris and Shlomo Sand. But Morris has considerably softened his extreme views in more recent times. The official story of Arab leaders pressing the people to leave the region so as not to be in harm’s way as their armies came in to crush the Jews compares very well to what seems to happen all the time when the regional Arab leaders brag about their successes while in fact suffering crushing defeats.

Tsakanikas “forgets” also to mention that about as many, 700 000 or more, Jews were brutally expelled from a number of Arab countries, like Iraq, Morocco and Yemen. These were taken in by the young Jewish state. Now, why is it that the big Arab states with their impressive oil-wealth have been unable or unwilling to receive these displaced Arabs into their own vast countries? Why do we still have to hear about Arab refugee camps and never about Jewish refugee camps?

Why is it that Israel has a fairly numerous and integrated Arabic population while a number of the neighboring Arab countries are “Judenrein” and want this situation to persist at all costs?

3. “I absolutely reject that [theological interpretation] in every possible way because Jesus is the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies,” said the professor who earned his *Sacrae Theologiae Doctor* at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

Where ever Tsakanikas may have studied to obtain whatever degree does not guarantee that his conclusions are respecting what the Bible teaches. As I have detailed in my first article, Jesus most clearly did not fulfill *all* Old Testament prophecies. He fulfilled all He had come to fulfill, all that concerned carrying our sins on the cross and all that was prophesied on His suffering, death and resurrection. But His coming return will fulfill a great number of other prophecies.

To state that all has been fulfilled is easy. To prove it decisively from Scripture is quite another, and Tsakanikas has not come forward with any such proof. His thesis is a theological imagination, astute but definitely unbiblical.

4. And thus, since “the *Khristós* has come,” the Catholic Faith “is what Judaism was always meant to be. It’s not being replaced. So, you can’t have either a dual covenant or a replacement covenant,” he said. Rather, God has reconstituted Israel “through the development of his promises and covenants to where God intended those promises and covenant to arrive, which was always at the Messiah.”

I will not say anything about the absurdity of the Catholic church and its ingrained opposition to the Jews being what Judaism was meant to be! All that is impressive about this massive religious structure is in fact repulsive as soon as we compare it to the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels.



But what about the Covenant? I agree that a dual covenant or a replacement covenant is a scriptural impossibility. In fact, all the covenants, from Abraham and David to the New Covenant, have been concluded with Israel. This is more than clear for the New Covenant:

The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant *with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah*. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (Jeremiah 31.31-33, my italics)

This covenant was not made with the Church, or with a “re-constituted” people of Israel. Through the saving work of Messiah, Israel entered visibly into this covenant on the day of Pentecost, see Acts 2. As Paul would write later, non-Jews were *integrated* into this covenant, beginning with the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, as wild branches grafted *in among* the cultivated branches of the olive tree of Israel, Romans 11.17. This is not a reconstitution of Israel. This is believing Israel, the remnant mentioned by the prophets, centered around the covenant concluded by Messiah through his blood.

This leads to two conclusions.

1. As history is still in progress, none of this is “definite”. A branch taken out can be grafted back in, and a branch grafted in can be taken out:

But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. (Romans 11.20-23)

What does it mean, to stand by faith? Clinging to the faith of a church without living by it? Surely, that cannot suffice! God will not be duped by some faint religiosity. He wasn't impressed while Israel travelled through the desert and He will not easily be now. This is what Paul intimates. Fear as you travel and do not trust in trinkets, however holy you may believe they are.

2. Israel's situation is not "definite" either. Its spiritual blindness will not last. The day will come when the door of salvation for the Gentiles will be shut and grace and mercy will at last turn again towards Israel, and the Deliverer, Messiah, will intervene in favor of Israel:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (Romans 11.25-27)

What Israel? Is it not clearly stated? "[He] shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob". If Israel here is supposed to be the Church, was the Church then marked by ungodliness? But a church marked by ungodliness will be spat out of His mouth, Revelation 3.16! No, when Israel will repent, the New covenant will come to a new and glorious chapter, as hinted at in Ezekiel 37.26.

5. Therefore, Tsakanikas summarized, "Jesus is now the land," which means "God's promise to Abraham has been fulfilled in the religion of the Messiah, as was always the goal of the three promises."<sup>8</sup> And so if you have received the Holy Spirit, then Holy Spirit is eternal life and divinity, and that's what God was always promising you were going to share in. That's the covenant that God would give you, eternal life, and you would have communion with

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<sup>8</sup> Concerning the people, the land and the temple.

God. So if you have eternal life through the Messiah, you're living in the land."

Again, Tsakanikas comes up with a great find of his: Jesus is the land. That *nothing* in Scripture allows this conclusion is apparently, again, no problem for him. His theological views will not allow him to accept a prophetic future for Israel, a future that Scripture makes every effort to underline, so he comes up, in fact, he *has* to come up with another high flying theological construct: as Jesus is the land, no other land is to be expected (for the Jews!). That this throws out hundreds of pages of prophecy, both in Old and New Testament, does not seem to bother him or many like him. *But Jesus is not the land.* There is no neat solution to turn everything inside out. God created us with physical bodies, with many promises that belong to a physical creation. And when the "spiritual" future will become reality, we will discover that the spiritual is not the opposite of the physical, but the coming together of all reality, of which the new Jerusalem will be the glorious manifestation. Jesus' resurrection *embodied* this new reality that is to be revealed. There will be a land and a city, and bread and wine ("For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." – Luke 22.16), and glory beyond compare.

Tsakanikas then comes up with an interesting line: "So if you have eternal life through the Messiah, you're living in the land." As an application of what the Bible teaches, one could almost go along with him. But there is a problem! What does he actually mean? What is it to "have eternal life"? We must not forget that he is talking about the Catholic church where "eternal life" is transmitted through a ritual on an unexpecting, unbelieving newborn baby. Like most people "with religion", this person will most likely grow up with no manifestation of any eternal life for the simple reason that this new life in Jesus is not transmitted through merely physical means. The Master said: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." The coming is a physical turning to Him and the drinking is a spiritual and conscious act of faith and appropriation. We cannot and must not water (!) this down to a mere rite!

Just for a moment listen to this strange teacher: “So if you have eternal life through the Messiah, you’re living in the land.” What land? What if that person finds a spiritual home in a different church. Will he still live “in the land”? Or is the land equivalent to the Roman Catholic Church? But who can really believe such a ‘sectarian’ solution? In fact, as soon one unhinges the truth and the promises of Scripture from their biblical foundation and context, one becomes a teacher of straw! Let us remember the word of the apostle: “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” (James 3.1)

6. As a “microcosm of the land,” the Old Testament temple always represented communion with God, he explained. And thus, “whenever Moses went into the tent temple, he came out radiating divinity” symbolizing that he was “partaking in the true land, God’s divinity”. The promise that the Israelites were blocked from, even as they remained in the physical land striving to live in God’s law so as to “eventually enter the temple again.”

I shall not spill much ink on this. Yet again, Tsakanikas comes out with some nice sounding words without any ground in Scripture. No, Moses was not partaking in the true land! The true land was the aim of their journey through the desert and he much desired to go there. And what *promise* were the Israelites blocked from? Into which temple did they expect to enter *again*? The confusion between land and temple is not very helpful, to say the least. The temple was definitely not a “microcosm of the land”. Land, city and temple belong together, but not because they are essentially the same. The temple, in the shape of the Tabernacle, came first, because the spiritual must have priority over the earthly, the holy over the profane, because the Presence will always be first. So they receive the temple first as a means to learn holiness without which there can be neither city nor land. And thus, when the temple disappears, the city and the land disappear as well, as it happened in 586 before Christ and in 70 AD. But neither judgment was the last word to

Israel. A restoration was announced, both for beyond the destruction by the Babylonians and for beyond the destruction by the Romans. And as we now see a return to the land, we know that the city and the temple cannot be far off, not as the prize of human effort, however religious, but as the work of Messiah. Because all shall be from Him as all is in Him.

7. Summarizing these points, Sammons concurred there is thus just one authentic Israel, which today remains the Catholic Church. "It's the same Israel, but it's also new. You can say both things are true."

This is indeed the essence of what Tsakanikas wants to put across. If one accepts this resume as a biblically sound conclusion, no real discussion remains. But if this is wrong, than all the rest comes undone. One authentic Israel, which was *then*, before 70 AD (?), the Israel of both Old and New Testaments, and is *now* the (Roman) Catholic Church? This is the ultimate theft. Israel reconstituted is in fact Israel dispossessed, without hope and without compassion. It is replacement theology with a different vocabulary. Note that Paul says the very opposite, when he writes to the Ephesian church: We, disciples from the Gentiles, *we* were without hope, without God and excluded from the covenant. And now, having been accepted in through the blood of the Beloved, we dare to kick out those in whom our very hope had been preserved? And we think that the God of Israel will look upon us benignly?

The *same* Israel? Does he mean the Baal serving oath breakers they were and whom the Church, more often than is comfortable, has followed? Because who can look upon the medieval Church and not cry out in horror and shame? That same Israel? No, of course not. It has become far too common to leave Israel with the maledictions and take from it all benediction. If at least the Church had become the best Israel should have been! But it has done no better, and maybe worse. By what miracle, the authentic Israel "remains in the Church" that has become one of the worst culprits of the persecution against Jews and

Christians alike? Have we forgotten? Has pride blinded us? Have we made Israel *jealous*, as Paul says in Romans 11.14? *Jealous*? Of the Vatican Church, its pride and pomp and its unforgivable arrogance? Jealous of the hypocrisy, the lust and the bottomless cupidity? I am not unfair! I try not to forget what there has been that was and is praiseworthy. I do not forget either St Anselm or St Maximilian Kolbe and those like them. But in the heavenly balances, could it ever be enough? And so much so that we could be justified of this theft of monumental proportions?

8. ... “the land is not theirs according to Christianity,” as God determined the land, including Jerusalem, to be “trodden down by the Gentiles” until the second coming (Luke 21:24), while also having promised in scripture that those Jews who reject the Messiah will be cut off from the People of God.

Since when does “trodden down” mean a transfer of property? It is rather the opposite. “Trodden down” means judgment and destruction. It means to be abandoned to the merciless hands of the enemy until the tide turns. The land once given cannot be taken away unless God, the Giver, is a liar, and that He is not. Had He given the land away during the Babylonian captivity? No. Listen to Jeremiah.51.5: “For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the LORD Almighty, though their land is full of guilt before the Holy One of Israel.” Punished, but not forsaken. Turned out of their land, but not forsaken. Abandoned? Not really. Just wait for the turning of the tide. Listen what happened as far as the land is concerned:

Therefore prophesy and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because they ravaged and crushed you from every side so that you *became the possession* of the rest of the nations and the object of people’s malicious talk and slander, therefore, mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, to the desolate ruins and the deserted towns that have been plundered and ridiculed by the rest of the nations around you—this is what the

Sovereign LORD says: In my burning zeal I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, for with glee and with malice in their hearts *they made my land their own possession* so that they might plunder its pastureland.' Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I speak in my jealous wrath because you have suffered the scorn of the nations. Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I swear with uplifted hand that the nations around you will also suffer scorn. 'But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, and I will cause many people to live on you—yes, all of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. I will increase the number of people and animals living on you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. *I will settle people on you as in the past* and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I will cause people, my people Israel, to live on you. *They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance*; you will never again deprive them of their children. (Ezekiel 36.3-12, italics mine)

The enemies behaved as if there was a change of owner, as if the land of Israel had been given to them. As a result, they destroyed the land. They didn't care for it. It meant nothing to them. Their only interest was to dispossess the Jews, to hurt them and to hate them. No one cared for land or people. Until the Lord caused the tide to turn and the people came back and the land recovered.

All of this takes us back to the Torah. God had said to Israel that being thrown out of their land was a real possibility. They could lose what they had received. But was that loss to be definite? Deuteronomy 30.4-7:

Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. *He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it.* He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may

love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. (Italics mine)

There would be a coming back. There would be a new possession of the land. And there will be a change of heart and a bringing back of Israel to the faith – not necessarily the *religion* – of its ancestors. It happened after the Babylonian captivity, and it will happen again. The land lay abandoned and fallow until the tide turned and Judah came back to its own.

Babylon became a solitude under the hands of the God of Israel. Now, since 70 AD, will it not be like in 586 before Christ? All that had been foretold as judgment has taken place. The blood of the Son of God, Israel's Messiah, was visited onto them as they had asked, Matthew 27.25. For the better part of 2000 years, curse upon curse flowed over the people and its land and over Jerusalem. The dark chapter of Deuteronomy 28 has been literally fulfilled. But the prophecy was still at work, see Jeremiah 31.35-37:

This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD Almighty is his name: “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the LORD, “will Israel ever cease being a nation before me.” This is what the LORD says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the LORD.

They were punished, but not forsaken. Turned out of their land, but not forsaken.

Abandoned since New Testament times? Not really. Just wait for the turning of the tide. And it *has* started to turn. From the late 19th century, tiny bit by tiny bit, the owners returned to their promised land, into their inheritance. Until most of it was theirs again by law. What remains “trodden down” is notably the Temple mount. What does that mean? That the “trodden down” period is coming rapidly to an end. That the second coming of Jesus is edging ever closer and that we should prepare for



His coming so as not to find ourselves left behind, like the foolish virgins of the parable. Because as the tide turns, judgment will overtake the temple destroyers, just as happened to Babylon. The curses of Deuteronomy will find a new destination.

Is it true that “the land is not theirs according to Christianity”? No. The only teaching “according to Christianity” is to be found in the New Testament. Luke 21.24 doesn’t mention ownership of the land. As far as I know, no other text in Scripture does. Even the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21.33-46 does not broach the subject. What is taken away? It cannot be the vineyard because it had never been the propriety of the tenants. The tenancy will be given to others:

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time. [...] Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit (Matthew 21.40,41,43).

Not the land, but the Kingdom. Until today, the Kingdom and the central role in God’s plan has been turned away from the Jews, and it will not come back to them until after the second coming. But then, come back to them it will. And in the meantime, *we* are left with a tall challenge: “give him the fruits in their seasons” Rather than bending over double to discuss whose is the land and whose is the Kingdom, we would do well to ask ourselves whether we are better tenants...

9. With the entire old covenant being ordered to fulfillment in the Messiah Jesus Christ (Rom 10:4), these are the “gifts and the call of God” which are irrevocable (Rom 11:29) that were offered first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles alike.

Two things need seeing to in this phrase: What does Romans 10.4 teach and what is contained in the statement that the “gifts and the call of God” are irrevocable, Romans 11.29?

Romans 10.4: “Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” J. B. Philips translates: “For Christ means the end of the struggle for righteousness-by-the-Law for everyone who believes in him.” By rephrasing the Law as the “entire old covenant”, Tsakanikas obscures the issue. In Romans 10.4, Paul refers to the Law as it pertained to sacrifices for sin to obtain forgiveness. We should be very careful to read into it anything else, particularly the promise of the land.

In his article, Tsakanikas writes: “So, the end of the law (*torah/nomou*) or the goal of *torah*—which was entering into communion with God—that goal is realized in Christ. Now through faith in Jesus Christ alone—instead of through temporary prefigurements of the ceremonial precepts of *torah* given by Moses—humans can have communion with God and receive the promises originally given to Abraham...even without the physical land.” The problem lies in those last words which have nothing to do here. A gentile does not become a Jew through his conversion to Christ. All that is particular to the Jew does not apply to him, like circumcision and vows. Paul as a Jewish Christian accepts these Jewish particularities as valid for him, circumcision in Acts 16.3 and vows in Acts 21.23-26, see 24.14. But that has nothing to do with being accepted of God and saved. Romans 10.4 has no bearing on these Jewish particularities, and neither on the land of Israel. Because all promises about the land are no longer valid? Of course not. Paul has already reminded us in Romans 9.4,5 what belongs to Israel:

... Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. (Romans 9.4,5)

These things belong to Israel and have not been transferred to the Church. As if Jews can only continue to see these blessings as theirs if they enter the Church! Israel, when it rejects the Messiah, is cut off from the Kingdom. But this is not the final curtain over their future. It is the beginning of the great

wandering amongst the nations. The dreadful curses of Deuteronomy 28 have all come to pass. And yet, that wasn't the end. They have fallen beyond imagination. But: "Did they stumble so as to fall *beyond recovery*? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, *how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!*" (Romans 11.11,12, my italics)

There is a future for Israel. The tide *will* turn. God will have mercy. The rejected Messiah will yet come to them and they will know Him and weep. God who is faithful will bring to pass what He promised. Should we, the Church, begrudge them that? Should we not rather rejoice as we see that the years of the locust are finally passing?

That brings us to Paul's last words about Israel:

"... And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (Romans 11.27-32)

"Them" in the first line means the Jews. That glorious day is not yet here. There is enmity between them and the Church because of the Gospel. But they are and remain God's chosen people. That gift is irrevocable as is His call. They cannot get away from that, just as we cannot. They like us are relentlessly pursued by the same mercy. Yes, some would say, but only if they join our Church! Listen! Do you hear the Pharisees reading the law to God? Telling God what the limits are of His mercy and grace? Do they realize that if you would have God turning His back on Israel, you saw the branch on which you yourself are

sitting? Do they realize that if God should have rejected Israel, He may equally well reject you?

10. Interpreting the old covenant, and the promises given to Abraham, apart from their ordered and purposeful fulfillment in Jesus Christ, is naturally judged to be a rejection of God's clear plan for the salvation of the world, which every Christian should recognize. In this way, Tsakanikas [deduces](#), religious Zionism pits itself "against God's revealed Messiah, and so it is rightly called *anti-Christ*."

First of all, no believing Christian would ever dream of interpreting the Biblical promises and prophecies outside their fulfillment in Jesus-Christ. The problem is that Tsakanikas holds a rather strange view of this fulfillment: the "ordered and purposeful fulfillment in Jesus Christ" means that the Old Testament has come to its historical end. All is fulfilled and all fulfillment has now to be seen in the sole light of the (Catholic) Church. And if some Christian should think there is a future for the historical Israel, he has pitted himself against God and is rightly called anti-Christ! At least, that is his *deduction*. It is not some clear revelation in Scripture. It is only a deduction. And on the basis of that doubtful deduction he condemns any Jew and any Christian who believes otherwise and accuses them to be in league with the Antichrist! When human deductions override Divine revelation, theology becomes sterile.

11. As a clear result of the incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ, over the last two millennia there have been developments in understanding morality and law which have made the world much more human regardless of creed. While the essence of such natural moral principles is accessible to reason alone, they have been authoritatively articulated and defined by the teaching of the New Israel, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

Before he comes to the present situation in the Middle East, Tsakanikas gives a sort of bird's eye view of these past two thousand years. First of all, he says that the world has become "much more human". Does he live in splendid isolation to draw such a strange conclusion? Has he not heard and seen anything of these two thousand years of wars, ever more devastating? Has the gradual spread of Christianity led to peace and justice? Have not popes and church leaders been guilty of condoning war and leading armies into war? Religious wars have they not ravaged the earth with their full consent? Does his "regardless of creed" include Islam's wars of extension and its massacres of Christians right up to our time, or the Mongol invasions with the likely intent of suppressing the Christian faith? And today, after two world wars, is the cause of peace any nearer? Does he forget the atom bomb, carried by a crew of protestant and catholic "Christians" that atomized Nagasaki's catholic cathedral? His "more human" world, does it take into account the millions of unborn children brutally slaughtered on the altars of our progressive world?

Much more human? By any chance, could it be that one of the causes of these ages of misery lies in the teaching articulated by "the New Israel, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church"? It is amazing how many untruths can be put together into one phrase! Allow me to line them up shortly:

*The new Israel?* But God has given the most detailed and persistent promises to the enduring place of Israel in His heart. Calling a church by such a name is a dagger into the heart of God.

*One?* Who can say that about a church that has systematically excluded all dissent by means of the Inquisition? How can a church maintain its claim to being the One Church when it excludes of its Communion whatever group of Christians does not recognize the Roman pontiff?

*Holy?* As an organized brand of the Christian faith, Rome is the very opposite of holiness. Its many persecutions and its

persistent financial and sexual corruption make a farce of any claim to holiness.

*Catholic?* If all it means is that one finds the Catholic Church everywhere, one could let it be. But, in fact, it goes a good deal further. No church is catholic, universal, unless it is in communion with Rome and its pope. All humanity *must* find its salvation in the Catholic Church because there is no salvation outside her. But surely, in that case the Church has taken the place of Christ!

*Apostolic?* If that means an unbroken chain from Peter to Francis, it just is not true. And if it means faithfulness to the faith and teaching of the apostles, it is even less true.

Has the world become “much more human” because of an arrogant Church, claiming for herself what she does not possess and teaching the world to submit to *her*? Most people and amongst them many Christians and many churches are not impressed. With Rome’s past as we know it, is it too much to ask for a little humility?

12. Though massacres by the Israeli army against this decimated people have been [routine occurrences](#) for decades, the death toll of Palestinians since October 7 of last year includes at least 41,662 ([40,972](#) in Gaza, [16,715 children](#), [11,308](#) women) with [10,000](#) more [buried](#) under the [rubble](#) (est. 4,900 women and children), and at least [691](#) in the West Bank (~[148](#) children), with [500,000](#) facing food insecurity and [37](#) deaths of children attributed to malnutrition.

With these last two quotes, my numbers 12 and 13, we leave behind us the field of theology. Tsakanikas turns to the politics of the recent conflict in the Middle East. He quotes a number of “facts” that are actually far from trustworthy. The first figure, for instance, stems from the Hamas authorities, known for having brought lying to new heights of monstrosity. There are no verifiable figures of dead and wounded and the truth could well be massively overstated by Hamas. Food insecurity is known to be due to Hamas taking over the food lorries and selling the

given food at exorbitant prices. But, of course, this is not the issue. To Tsakanikas, and many like him, *any* accusation against Israel holds, however unlikely. His theology has immunized him against facts. He, and those who believe him, become bedfellows to some of the most violent and spiteful people on this earth. He cannot ignore their chant “From the river to the sea” which suggests openly to ethnically cleanse the country of Israel like they want to bring it about. Does he realize the horror implicated? How many more “October 7ths” will it take before he will realize the extent to which he has been lied to? Is he happy to be aligned with those who plan night and day for a new Holocaust?

The “genocide” claim against Israel “is as ludicrous as it is monstrous. Genocide is the intentional annihilation of a people.” In fact, the genocide claim applies to Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. They have never hidden their purpose of wiping Israel from the map. This is why Iran works overtime to obtain nuclear weapons. “To suggest that such self-defense [against open Iranian and Palestinian hatred] is genocide is cynical linguistic inversion and moral bankruptcy of the highest order.”

The pope has said: “No war is worth the tears of a mother who has seen her child mutilated or killed; no war is worth the loss of the life of even one human being.” Who would want to disagree? But why is this laid at the feet of Israel and *never* at the feet of the likes of Hamas and Hezbollah? *Who* are known for using civilians as human shields? *Who* have built a vast arsenal and an elaborate tunnel system, using up billions of dollars? *Who* have refused their civilians to hide in their tunnels for safety? *Who* have put their rocket launch pads in or next to schools and hospitals? And why has the UN never brought this up? Their people were employed on the spot. They could not possibly have ignored what all this would lead to. And now the Pope takes up their cause?

“Seeing only the awful consequences of war, the cause becomes irrelevant. War to stop a genocide thus becomes as bad as genocide.

That amoral thinking leads him [the Pope] effectively to deny any justification for a just war. He thus inevitably condemns innocent victims of aggression — in this case, the Israelis — to unlimited slaughter, torture and suffering, and ultimately the State of Israel itself to existential destruction.

Believing that war is itself a crime against humanity, he excuses, sanitises and implicitly encourages actual crimes against humanity while anathematising the defence against them.

By believing that this Marxist-derived ideology represents conscience, Pope Francis has made himself an accomplice of evil.”<sup>9</sup>

I do not say that Tsakanikas holds the same opinion as the Pope. But it is more than likely seen what he affirms. In his antipathy towards Israel and towards all Christians who refuse to accept his opinions, not only is he joining the Mullahs in their undisguised hatred of Israel, but he has become blind to the utter ridicule of his conclusions.

13. As is well-documented, such brazen lies were on [full display](#) in July when Zionist Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke before the U.S. Congress repeating long-debunked atrocity propaganda about the events of October 7, blaming Hamas for the deaths of perhaps hundreds of Israelis who were intentionally killed by the Israeli army themselves...

What else can one say once one is ready to join this sort of fantasy against all evidence? In that case, is there still any possibility for argument? Doesn't one finish by building one's own shadow world into which reason and fact can no longer penetrate?

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<sup>9</sup> [https://melaniephillips.substack.com/p/the-popes-embrace-of-evil?publication\\_id=77655&post\\_id=151995945&isFreemail=true&r=8t6ei&triedRedirect=true](https://melaniephillips.substack.com/p/the-popes-embrace-of-evil?publication_id=77655&post_id=151995945&isFreemail=true&r=8t6ei&triedRedirect=true)



The saddest thing is that this kind of allegation can be easily verified. Let us state the problem properly:

For the accusation to be true, the following three requirements must be met: 1. Such a murderous attack must be known to be a habit of the attackers. 2. The atrocity of the acts must correspond to the known character of both the politicians and the soldiers who ordered or executed it. 3. The 250 hostages taken by force must be somewhere in Israel. If these assertions are proven to be erroneous, the allegation falls.

1. Overall, the Israeli army is known for its respect for innocent civilians. For example, it fairly systematically warns Gazan and Lebanese civilians of the attacks it is preparing. This is to be compared with the habits of other armed forces, such as during the Second World War, for example, the bombings of Rotterdam, Dresden and Hiroshima. This must also be compared with the launching of rockets and missiles on cities and villages by Hamas and Hezbollah, always without warning and whose aim to strike civilians is obvious. Statement 1 is therefore invalidated and even turns against the accusing Palestinians and their relays in the West.
2. A people is educated by its ancestral religion. This ends up entering deeply into the character of a people. Now, it is not very difficult to know how the people of Israel as a whole stand out in the face of barbaric acts or human tragedies. Their actions are marked by compassion and help. Think of the Palestinians treated in Israeli hospitals, or the humanitarian teams sent around the world. Here too, a comparison must be made. How are movements like Hamas and Hezbollah characterized? I am thinking of the savage executions of those Gazans suspected of espionage, the refusal to let civilians find refuge in the numerous tunnels, the placement of rocket launchers in or near schools and hospitals. Statement 2 is therefore invalidated and even turns against the accusing Palestinians and their relays in the West.

3. Where were the hostages “liberated” from? From Tel Aviv or from Gaza? Where are those who are still languishing in that rathole where the presence of the Red Cross has been systematically refused? Why is Israel being threatened in Gaza with *other* October 7s? What were the tunnels of both Hamas and Hezbollah supposed to be used for? To protect against global warming? As the hostages do come from Hamas strongholds in Gaza, is the Israeli army therefore in collusion with the worst of their enemies? Where is the logic behind all that? Yes, statement 3 is also invalidated and turns just as much against the accusing Palestinians and their relays in the West.

All the evidence to support the accusation is therefore missing, and what Tsakanikas writes is just slander and calumny. This is what the apostle Paul writes about that:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, (2 Timothy 3.2,3).

By spreading this slander, he finds himself in strange company! He joins those who have spread this kind of accusations throughout history:

Blood libel or ritual murder libel (also blood accusation) is an anti-semitic canard which falsely accuses Jews of murdering Christians in order to use their blood in the performance of religious rituals. Echoing very old myths of secret cultic practices in many prehistoric societies, the claim, as it is leveled against Jews, was rarely attested to in antiquity. According to Tertullian, it originally emerged in late antiquity as an accusation made against members of the early Christian community of the Roman Empire. Once this accusation had been dismissed, it was revived a millennium later as a Christian slander against Jews in the medieval period. ([Wikipedia](#), the article is well done)

This is in fact one of the oldest anti-Jewish allegations in history, predating Christianity. There are said to have been over 150 accusations and probably thousands of rumors under this

same heading. What a sad thing to see a professor of theology join such a crowd!

It is time to finish. Since these articles conclude on such a political note, the question comes to mind to know whether there is a link between the theology and the politics defended by the author. Are his theological suggestions a consequence of his political conclusions, or is it the other way round?

It is hardly surprising there is a link. It cannot really be otherwise. The allegation that God has taken away all future for Israel outside the Catholic Church leads naturally to an anti-Israel bias in the modern world. And entertaining this kind of thinking about Israel makes for a perfect breeding ground for theological fantasies based on biased interpretations of Scripture.

There remains a third reaction, not to Tsakanikas' writings but to an article by Benedict XVI that he quotes. As it touches upon the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Jewish state, some thoughts on this might be useful.

## When the Church talks about Israel – 3

In 2018, Pope Benedict XVI wrote an article about the place of the people of Israel in the Divine plan. After my comments on the articles concerning Professor Matthew Tsakanikas, it seemed interesting to add some comments on this article quoted by him.<sup>10,11</sup>

**Benedict XVI**

### **Grace and vocation without remorse: comments on the treatise *De Judaëis***

Some comments by Egbert Egberts

After Tsakanikas' rather disappointing theological comments and verbal violence against Israel, Benedict XVI's peaceful spirit and theological competence are refreshing. Former German Cardinal Joseph A. Ratzinger sets the tone in the very first line: "The covenant between God and Israel is indestructible because of the continuity of God's election." But what does it mean this "continuity of election"? After the destruction of the temple in Babylonian times, this continuity of election meant that God had not finished with Israel, that he would be faithful to His people, to the remnant of whom Isaiah spoke. Isaiah spoke of promises that would surely be fulfilled. Indeed, at the time announced, there was a return to the land and a rebuilding of the

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<sup>10</sup> *Communio* 45 (Spring 2018). © 2018 in *Communio: International Catholic Review*., Spring 2018, Pages 163-184. [https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1\\_Benedict\\_XVI.pdf](https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1_Benedict_XVI.pdf). [https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1\\_Benedict\\_XVI.pdf](https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1_Benedict_XVI.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> See also the following article on the historical background of the relationship between the Vatican and Israel: [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oremus\\_et\\_pro\\_perfidis\\_Judaëis](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oremus_et_pro_perfidis_Judaëis).

temple. Is it the same thing after the destruction in 70 AD by the Romans?

Here is what Benedict XVI writes:

In fact, there are two responses in history to the destruction of the temple and the new radical exile of Israel: Judaism and Christianity. It is true that Israel had already experienced several times [sic] the situation of the destruction of the temple and scattering. However, each time they were permitted to hope for a rebuilding of the temple and a return to the promised land. After the destruction of the temple in the year 70 AD, and definitively after the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt, the concrete situation was different. In the given situation, the destruction of the temple and the scattering of Israel had to be considered as lasting at least a very long time. Finally, it became increasingly clear in the course of development that the temple with its cult was not to be restored, even if the political situation allowed it. But there was another answer for Jews to the destruction and scattering, an answer that, from the beginning, presupposed these events as definitive, and presupposed that the resulting situation was a process that the faith of Israel itself anticipated.

These lines are fascinating! The former pope states two things as fact but without really justifying them. The first is to affirm that Christianity is a response to the destruction of the temple. This, of course, is not the case and the silence of the New Testament on this subject is deafening, particularly so in the last books of the New Testament, those manifestly written after the Jewish war in 66-70 AD. All the more so since Jesus had clearly announced this destruction. This silence becomes even more oppressive if we must follow those of the moderns who date the writing of many of the books of the New Testament after the year 70. The Christian Church is actually a response to the mission that the resurrected Christ has given to his disciples. The political events that followed, right up to today, have only been the framework on which the Gospel of the coming of the Messiah is woven. That the Jewish and Christian communities have diverged more and more is a fact that must undoubtedly be accepted and deplored at the same time. This seems to be the result of two developments. First of all the restructuring of

Judaism becoming more rigid after the calamity of the year 70 and distancing itself from the growing Church. But it is also the development of a Christianity that became more and more politicized from the fourth century on. To the initial persecutions by the Jews, recounted in the New Testament, were sadly added the ever more violent persecutions of the Jews by the Church once it had become dominant.

Benedict XVI continues: “Finally, it became increasingly clear in the course of development that the temple with its cult was not to be restored.” To what do these words refer? *What* development after 135, if not that of the Church of the Middle Ages and beyond? If not, the development of theology? The reason that the Pope invokes is neither found in Scripture nor in a better understanding of it. It is not in a revelation that would have been given. It is not a spiritual necessity. This “it became increasingly clear” is in fact shocking. Why? Because it goes against what the Bible teaches and because it passes a bit easily over writings such as the *Adversus Judaeos* of Chrysostom in the fourth century. Not that Benedict XVI approves of this kind of writings, but the development that he invokes to exclude any prophetic future for Israel is nourished by this kind of texts and understandings.

However, the Scriptures have a lot to say about the future of Israel.

Let me quote first what God announced through the prophet Zechariah. Why Zechariah? Because he prophesied after the return of Judah from its exile in Babylon. It was the right time to see in the events that had just been experienced—the return from exile—the fulfillment of all the prophecies and the search for a symbolic meaning of what had not yet been accomplished “to the letter.” But this is not the case! He says that God himself will return to Jerusalem and bring the people back: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.” (8:7,8) But there had not yet been a dispersion to the west (literally: the setting sun)! In

another vision, he sees a future dispersion and a new return, 10:6-10:

I will strengthen Judah and save the tribes of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them. The Ephraimites will become like warriors, and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and be joyful; their hearts will rejoice in the LORD. I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before. Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them.

Note that this is not the return of which the prophet himself was a witness, but *another* return after *another* dispersion, announced by the words: “Though I scatter them among the peoples”. This text cannot therefore be applied to the Church born *before* this dispersion.

Later on, he sees Jerusalem besieged and becoming “a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling”, “an immovable rock for all the nations”, 12.2-3. Not only did this not apply at the time of the prophet, but it cannot be applied to any time since, until these modern times. Should we therefore spiritualize these words and see them as an image of the persecution of the Church, “the new Jerusalem”? Or should we know how to be patient and wait for future accomplishments to be made in the same way as the first accomplishments? We live in the time when this city, insignificant until very recently, has become “an immovable rock” of all peoples.

Like other prophets, Zechariah discerns a return of the northern tribes, and he did not see in the return from Babylon the fulfillment of all the prophecies on this subject. On the contrary, it is when Jerusalem will intoxicate the whole world and the nations will seek once again to devour the holy city that God will rise in its favor and the rejected Messiah will finally be

revealed: “On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.” (12:9-11)

This messianic future is also viewed in texts like Ezekiel 40-48 and its detailed description of the temple rebuilt during the messianic reign.

Of course, we do not understand everything the prophets say about the future of Israel. Big questions are raised to which the answers are not necessarily simple. But that the prophets see a real, earthly future for the people of Israel is clear. They understood it that way, their audience understood it that way, the Jewish people have always understood it that way. Jesus’ disciples understood it that way: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus does not correct their understanding! The priority is that of the mission that Jesus entrusts to his disciples, but this in no way cancels out the future of Israel.

As we have seen, Benedict XVI adds the following sentence:

But there was another answer for Jews to the destruction and scattering, an answer that, from the beginning, presupposed these events as definitive, and presupposed that the resulting situation was a process that the faith of Israel itself anticipated

But what did Israel’s faith anticipate? That the Church was the continuation, the new face of Israel? That Israel’s future would therefore be limited to being absorbed by a Church increasingly marked by anti-Israel preaching? If only this Church had provoked Israel to jealousy as the apostle writes:



But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Romans 11.12-15)

But the development of the Church throughout the centuries that followed, both in Catholicism and Orthodoxy as in a large part of Protestantism, has only antagonized Israel, condemned it and mistreated it. How then *dare* to teach on the faith of Israel which would have anticipated the Church as the continuity of Israel? And push it even further when writing that Israel would have anticipated that its situation in its rejection and its suffering was definitive when the prophets of Israel say exactly the opposite? It is not even the debate that is indisposing, it is the pretension.

How to lead a humble and sensitive discussion between Jews and Christians? Benedict XVI proposes two contrasting interpretations, but there surely must be a third way. *The first way* is that of the synagogue which the former pope summarizes thus: “Their basic argument is and reads: the messiah brings peace; [but] Christ did not bring peace into the world.” *The second way* is that of the traditional Church: “Jesus anticipated the event of the destruction of the temple and announced a new form of worship, whose midpoint would be the gift of his body, by which the Sinai covenant would be brought to its definitive form, becoming the new covenant. At the same time, the covenant would be extended to all believers, thus giving the promise of land its definitive meaning.” *But there is a third way.* We encounter it increasingly in more recent understandings of the Christian faith. It is made up of several threads:

- A new reading of the prophets of Israel and the awareness that the traditional reading does not do justice to the texts.

- A renewed awareness of the suffering that the Church has inflicted on Israel throughout history by claiming to be the New Israel that replaces or reconstitutes national Israel.
- A rude awakening after the dark night of the Shoah and the founding of the nation of Israel with the awareness that God is at work and that the dry bones of Ezekiel 37 have begun to quiver in view of the announced renewal.
- The theology of the two brothers, rooted in the parable of the prodigal son. Israel is our elder brother and his return in Jesus' parable remains an open question.
- The recognition that we are living in the final period of current history and that the expected Return is at hand.

The Old Testament announces Christ and Christ is the goal, *telos*, of the Law, as the apostle writes. But the dynamics of the Old Testament do not stop at the cross and the resurrection. These form the pivot of History without which *nothing* makes sense. But to the Christic anticipation of the Old Testament corresponds an equal messianic anticipation, if I may be permitted to distinguish them in this way, both of the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament ends with the announcement of the coming of Elijah in Malachi 3.23,24, preparing the way of the Coming One and the New Testament takes this up from its first pages. And the New Testament ends with the promise of the Return: "He who testifies to these things says: Yes, I am coming soon." However, traditional theology has gradually obscured this second part. And now, the Spirit of God has begun to awaken believers and Churches to the imminent realization of their hope.

The current situation is no longer that of previous centuries. No discussion between Jews and Christians can ignore those long centuries of persecution that culminated in the Shoah. We have obscured the Gospel in the eyes of the Jewish people. By maintaining with insatiable hatred the tradition of the guilt of the deicidal people – banishments, pogroms, ghettos, contempt and, finally, in that "most Christian" nation in Europe, the Shoah – we have opened the abyss of our own guilt. If this

hatred has slowly been replaced by a new understanding and a new respect, this process has remained very partial. The anti-Semitism of the Church has been largely replaced by anti-Zionism, which manifests itself with a disconcerting ease in joining the worst enemies of Israel by denying it any future *extra ecclesiam*. The Church thus maintains that nothing has really changed in its policy towards Israel. It gets even worse! When God opens a new chapter in his book of History and hears the cries of his people, does the Church rejoice? Not at all! She argues, reasons and objects, stumbling in her guilt. She maintains that there is no hope for Israel without realizing that she is sawing off the branch on which she herself is sitting.

Yet, in Benedict XVI's text, there are many encouraging things that show this change of mind. Here are a number of them I found interesting:

- Israel is undeniably the possessor of Holy Scripture. [...] The Fathers of the Church, such as Augustine, emphasized that Israel must be deemed as existing apart from the community of the Church in order to attest to the authenticity of the Sacred Scriptures.
- Not only does St. Paul speak of “all Israel being saved,” but also the Book of Revelation of St. John sees two groups of the redeemed: 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel (which expresses in another language the same thing that Paul meant by the phrase “all Israel”)...
- Israel, however, always retained the knowledge that a purely spiritual sacrifice is insufficient. I refer to two texts: Daniel 3:37-43<sup>12</sup> and Psalm 51:19ff.

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<sup>12</sup> <sup>37</sup> Or, Lord, we are the fewest of all nations, brought low today on the earth because of our sins. <sup>38</sup> In this time, there is no ruler, prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, sacrifice, or oblation, no incense, and no place to offer our firstfruits to find mercy. <sup>39</sup> But with contrite hearts and humble spirits, receive us, as a burnt offering of thousands of fat lambs. May our sacrifice today be pleasing to you, for there is no shame for those who trust

The Psalm says clearly in verse 16f: “You take no delight in sacrifice. . . . The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit.” Then, surprisingly, in verse 18 the request and the prediction follow: “Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.” ...

For Christians, the total self-gift of Jesus in the crucifixion is the only possible and at the same time necessary God-given synthesis of both views: the bodily Lord gives himself as a whole for us.

- In Israel, the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement and the daily sin offering were destined to carry and abolish all injustice in the world. Animal sacrifices, however, could only be a gesture that pointed toward the power that reconciles in truth.
- The incarnate Son of God who takes all of the suffering and all of the guilt of the world upon himself is now this reconciliation.
- In the medieval debates between Jews and Christians, it was common for the Jewish side to quote Isaiah 2:2-5 (Mi 4:1-5) as the core of the messianic hope. We see how the one who makes a messianic claim must prove his identity before the bar of these words: “He shall decide the conflict of peoples . . . and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Is 2:4; Mi 4:3f ). It is clear that these words have not been fulfilled, but remain an expectation of the future.
- I have shown that according to Jesus’ understanding of history, a “time of the Gentiles” comes between the destruction of the temple and the end of the world.
- St. Luke tells us that Jesus, the Risen One, on the way with two disciples, also led them on an interior journey. He reads, as it were, the Old Testament anew with them. In this way, they learn to understand in an entirely new way the promises and hopes of

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in you. <sup>40</sup> And now, with all our heart, we follow you; we fear you and seek your face. <sup>41</sup> Don’t let us be put to shame, but deal with us according to your kindness and great mercy. <sup>42</sup> Deliver us in accordance with your wonders, and bring glory to your name, Lord. <sup>43</sup> Deliver us in accordance with your wonders, and bring glory to your name, Lord. (*The apocryphal prayer of Azariah*)

Israel and the figure of the messiah. They discover that the fate of the Crucified and Risen One, who mysteriously travels with the disciples, is foreshadowed in these books. They learn a new reading of the Old Testament. ... It also describes in essence the conversation between Jews and Christians as it should be up until today—a conversation that, unfortunately, has occurred only in rare moments.

- The fathers were well aware of this new structuring of history when, for example, they described the movement of history according to the threefold scheme of umbra—imago—veritas. The time of the Church (the “time of the Gentiles”) is not yet the arrival of open veritas (= Is 2 and Mi 4). It is still imago; that is, it still stands in the interim, albeit in a new openness. Bernard of Clairvaux correctly portrayed this when he changed the account of the twofold advent of Christ into a threefold presence of the Lord, calling the time of the Church an *Adventus medius*.
- The time of Jesus, the “time of the Gentiles,” is not a time of cosmic transformation in which the final decisions between God and man are already complete, but a time of freedom. In this time God encounters mankind through the crucified love of Jesus Christ in order to gather them into the kingdom of God through a free yes. It is the time of freedom, and that also means a time in which evil continues to have power. God’s power during this time is a power of patience and love that remains effective against the power of evil. It is a time of God’s patience, which is often too great for us—a time of victories, but also a time when love and truth are defeated. The ancient Church summed up the essence of this time in the saying “*Regnavit a ligno Deus*” [“God reigns from a tree”]. In being on the road with Jesus like the Emmaus disciples, the Church is constantly learning to read the Old Testament with him and thus to understand anew. She learns to recognize that this is precisely what was predicted about the “messiah.” And, in dialogue with the Jews, she tries again and again to show that all this is “scriptural.” Because of this, spiritual theology has always emphasized that the time of the Church is not about arriving in paradise, but corresponds to a forty-year exodus of Israel worldwide.

There is much here that corresponds to an essentially biblical understanding and this must be noted with gratitude. At the same time, there are still differences! The following two quotes are proof of this:

In fact, there is really no “substitution,”<sup>13</sup> but a journey that eventually becomes one reality. And yet this entails the necessary disappearance of animal sacrifices, in place of which (“substitution”) the Eucharist occurs.

No, it is not the Eucharist, but the sacrifice of Jésus that replaces the Old Testament sacrifices. The Eucharist as having become the equivalent of the sacrifice of Jésus darkens the truth.

It is evident that the *entire* Old Testament is a book of hope. At the same time, this hope expresses itself in changing forms. It is further evident that this hope points less and less to an earthly and political power, and that the importance of the passion as an essential element of hope comes increasingly to the fore.

Benedict XVI seems to play the Passion of Jesus against the hope taught by the prophets. His “less and less” is meaningless as soon as one begins to read prophets like Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah! But Catholic theology rejects any messianic “political” future. It is therefore essential to concentrate everything on the Passion to the exclusion of any other fulfillment of the prophets. This is particularly evident in the treatment of the promises surrounding the land of Israel.

The author first compares the different emphases between Jews and Christians. For the latter, “the true city, the actual country to which they are going, lies in the future. The promise of land refers to the future world and relativizes the different affiliations to particular countries.” For the Jews, it was not until the 19th century that persecution in Eastern Europe contributed to the birth of Zionism as a movement to return to the Promised Land. Of course, the prayer “next year in Jerusalem”

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<sup>13</sup> A reference to the theology of substitution: the Church has replaced Israel. He speaks of the Old Testament sacrifices that find their fulfillment in Christ.

had kept alive the hope of a return throughout the centuries of the Diaspora, but the concrete response to this desire only came towards the end of the 19th century, culminating in 1948. For Catholic theology – and not only Catholic – this led to an obvious problem: there cannot be a Jewish state that is the fulfillment of the prophecies. The spiritual future of Israel *must* be limited to its entry into the Church:

At its core is the conviction that a strictly theologically-understood state—a Jewish faith-state [*Glaubenstaat*] that would view itself as the theological and political fulfillment of the promises—is unthinkable within history according to Christian faith and contrary to the Christian understanding of the promises. At the same time, however, it was made clear that the Jewish people, like every people, had a natural right to their own land. As already indicated, it made sense to find the place for it in the historical dwelling place of the Jewish people. In the political situation of the collapsing Ottoman Empire and the British protectorate, this could be found in a manner consistent with the standards of international law. In this sense, the Vatican has recognized the State of Israel as a modern constitutional state, and sees it as a legitimate home of the Jewish people, the rationale of which cannot be derived directly from Holy Scripture. Yet, in another sense, it expresses God's faithfulness to the people of Israel.

The nontheological character of the Jewish state means, however, that it cannot as such be considered the fulfillment of the promises of Scripture. ... [...] In contrast to the ridicule of the people who represented Israel's God as vanquished and landless, it now became clear that precisely in giving away the land, the divinity of God is revealed—a God who is not only God of a particular country, but a God to whom the world as a whole belonged. He exercises dominion over the world and can newly redistribute according to his will. Thus Israel, in exile, has finally realized that their God is a God above the gods, who freely disposes of history and nations.

This raises some important questions. What Tsakanikas puts more virulently, Benedict XVI says more tactfully. But the biblical problem remains. The limitation in the fulfillment of prophecies that the Church teaches lacks a sound basis in the Word of God and cannot be received. Here, it clearly goes

beyond what is written, 1 Corinthians 4:6, since the Bible clearly announces such a fulfillment. Not only did God give the land of Israel to his people by oath, but he *never* “redistributed” it to anyone else. The promise of the gift of the land has never been abrogated. Jerusalem, Zion, is the only place of which God says it is “my” mountain (e.g. Ezekiel 20:40-44). He *never* gave it to others. He drove his people out twice to make it into a desolation, Ezekiel 15.6-8, while waiting for the people to return. It became a desolate land for many centuries. But since the people began to return, the land has begun to flourish again. Could this be a sign that the wandering is finally coming to an end?

The point is not really whether the current State of Israel is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. That would be to suggest that we are already living in the time of the messianic reign. We are not there yet. The current political State is only an intermediate stage, a bit like the Hasmonean kingdom of Israel that emerged from the Maccabean revolt in the second century BC. But after the centuries long wandering far from their country, who can read the Bible and maintain that the current return is not, at least, a sign? Yes, God freely disposes of nations and in the face of the boundless pride of modern States, this must be said loud and clear. But this sovereignty cannot be used to dispossess the Jewish people of their land.

We must therefore recognize that the Bible presents *at the same time* an eternal city of which God is the Builder, Hebrews 11.9,10, and a temporal city, the Jerusalem restored by the Messiah when he comes. The return of the people of Israel tells us that this future is at hand. Now if our theology has come to the conclusion that this is neither possible nor desirable, it has practically become a defense of unbelief.

### **Some final thoughts on the Covenant**

Benedict XVI ends with a few paragraphs on the covenants. He mentions the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the new covenant.



A new stage of covenant theology can be found in the Letter to the Hebrews, which takes up the promise of the new covenant (announced with particular clarity in Jer 31) and compares it with previous covenants. These are all gathered together under the heading of the “first covenant,” which is now replaced by the final, “new” covenant.

That last sentence is not quite accurate. The first covenant, Hebrews 8:7, is not the entire history of covenants up to the coming of Christ, but specifically the Sinai covenant of which Moses was the mediator. Hebrews 9:1 is proof of this. This first covenant is same as the “old covenant” of which Hebrews 8:13 says: “By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.” Until now, Israel as a people has never entered into this new covenant. Does that mean that it is living in the old covenant, the Sinai covenant? That is not really possible either. The destruction of the temple makes obedience within the framework of that covenant impossible. Israel is thus in a kind of no-man’s land as far as the covenant is concerned. Until the Shekinah is restored, the people are wandering. The return to the promised land did not in itself put an end to this wandering. Will the Shekina be one day restored to Israel? Yes, but only when the people as a people will recognize their Messiah, Jesus. Then, at last, the people will enter into the new covenant:

They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.’ ” (Ezekiel 37:25-28)

God remains faithful to Israel. The day will come when the love that brought the Son of God to the cross will touch the heart

of His people and bring them there where *all* must be brought if they are not to be lost forever. "...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you."

The disobedience of Israel is one of the tragedies of world history, but mercy will come to them as it came to us. Would that the Church, through her love, would encourage Israel to repent. There is a Jewish saying that, if Israel repented a single day, the son of David would come immediately. (JT Ta'anit 64a)

Earlier on, I had quoted the prophet Zechariah:

On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ..." (Zechariah 12.9-11)

God promises that the day of a national repentance will come at the very time when all nations will gather to finish once and for all with the Jewish problem and destroy Jerusalem. Seen the political realities of our time, that day may well not be very far off. If there is to be a grace without remorse for the Church, isn't it high time for *her* to mend her ways?