ZIONISM
AN AFFIRMATION
OF JUDAISM

A Reply by 757 Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Rabbis of America to a Statement Issued by Ninety Members of the Reform Rabbinate Charging That Zionism Is Incompatible with the Teachings of Judaism


WE, THE UNDERSIGNED RABBIS of all elements in American Jewish religious life, have noted with concern a statement by ninety of our colleagues in which they repudiate Zionism on the ground that it is inconsistent with Jewish religious and moral doctrine. This statement misrepresents Zionism and misinterprets historic Jewish religious teaching, and we should be derelict in our duty if we did not correct the misapprehensions which it is likely to foster.

We call attention in the first place to the fact that the signatories to this statement, for whom as fellow-Rabbis we have a high regard, represent no more than a very small fraction of the American rabbinate. They constitute a minority even of the rabbinate of
Reform Judaism with which they are associated. The overwhelming majority of American Rabbis regard Zionism not only as fully consistent with Judaism but as a logical expression and implementation of it.

Our colleagues concede the need for Jewish immigration into Palestine as contributing towards a solution of the vast tragedy of Jewish homelessness. They profess themselves ready to encourage such settlement. They are aware of the important achievements, social and spiritual, of the Palestinian Jewish community and they pledge to it their unstinted support. And yet, subscribing to every practical accomplishment of Zionism, they have embarked upon a public criticism of it. In explanation of their opposition they advance the consideration that Zionism is nationalistic and secularistic. On both scores they maintain it is incompatible with the Jewish religion and its universalistic outlook. They protest against the political emphasis which, they say, is now paramount in the Zionist program and which, according to them, tends to confuse both Jews and Christians as to the place and function of the Jewish group in American society. They appeal to the prophets of ancient Israel for substantiation of their views.

TEASURING the doctrines and moral principles of our faith no less than they, devoted equally to America and its democratic processes and spirit, we nonetheless find every one of their contentions totally without foundation.

Zionism is not a secularist movement. It has its origins and roots in the authoritative religious texts of Judaism. Scripture and rabbinical literature alike are replete with the promise of the restoration of Israel to its ancestral home. Anti-Zionism, not Zionism, is a departure from the Jewish religion. Nothing in the entire pronouncement of our colleagues is more painful than their appeal to the prophets of Israel—to those very prophets whose inspired and recorded words of national rebirth and restoration nurtured and sustained the hope of Israel throughout the ages.

Nor is Zionism a denial of the universalistic teachings of Judaism. Universalism is not a contradiction of nationalism. Nationalism as such, whether it be English, French, American or Jewish, is not in itself evil. It is only militaristic and chauvinistic nationalism, that nationalism which shamelessly flouts all mandates of international morality, which is evil. The prophets of Israel looked forward to the time not when all national entities would be obliterated, but when all nations would walk in the light of the Lord, live by His law and learn war no more.

Our colleagues find themselves unable to subscribe to the political emphasis "now paramount in the Zionist program." We fail to perceive what it is to which they object. Is it to the fact that there are a regularly constituted Zionist organization and a Jewish Agency which deal with the mandatory government, the Colonial office, the League of Nations and other recognized political bodies? But obviously, even immigration and colonization are practical matters which require political action. The settlement of a half million Jews in Palestine since the last war was made possible by political action which culminated in the Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate. There can be little hope of opening the doors of Palestine for mass Jewish immigration after the war without effective political action.
Or is it that they object to the ultimate achievement by the Jewish community of Palestine of some form of Jewish statehood? We are not so bold as to predict the nature of the international order which will emerge from the present war. It is altogether likely, and indeed it may be desirable, that all sovereign states shall under the coming peace surrender some of their sovereignty to achieve a just and peaceful world society.

Certainly our colleagues will allow to the Jews of Palestine the same rights that are allowed to all other peoples resident on their own land. If Jews should ultimately come to constitute a majority of the population of Palestine, would our colleagues suggest that all other peoples in the post-war world shall be entitled to political self-determination, whatever form that may take, but the Jewish people in Palestine shall not have such a right? Or do they mean to suggest that the Jews in Palestine shall forever remain a minority in order not to achieve such political self-determination?

PROTESTING their sympathy both for the homeless Jews of the world and for their brethren in Palestine, our colleagues have by their pronouncement done all these a grave disservice. It may well be that to the degree to which their efforts are at all effective, Jews who might otherwise have found a haven in Palestine will be denied one. The enemies of the Jewish homeland will be strengthened in their propaganda as a result of the aid which these Rabbis have given them. To the Jews of Palestine, facing the gravest danger in their history and fighting hard to maintain morale and hope in the teeth of the totalitarian menace, this pronouncement comes as a cruel blow.

We do not mean to imply that our colleagues intended it as such. We have no doubt that they are earnest about their finespun theoretical objections to Zionism. We hold, however, that these objections have no merit, and further that voicing them at this time has been unwise and unkind.

We have not the least fear that our fellow Americans will be led to misconstrue the attitudes of American Jews to America because of their interest in Zionism. Every fair-minded American knows that American Jews have only one political allegiance—and that is to America. There is nothing in Zionism to impair this loyalty. Zionism has been endorsed in our generation by every President from Woodrow Wilson to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and has been approved by the Congress of the United States. The noblest spirits in American life, statesmen, scholars, writers, ministers and leaders of labor and industry, have lent their sympathy and encouragement to the movement.

Jews, and all non-Jews who are sympathetically interested in the plight of Jewry, should bear in mind that the defeat of Hitler will not of itself normalize Jewish life in Europe. An Allied peace which will not frankly face the problem of the national homelessness of the Jewish people will leave the age-old tragic status of European Jewry unchanged. The Jewish people is in danger of emerging from this war not only more torn and broken than any other people, but also without any prospects of a better and more secure future and without the hope that such tragedies will not recur again and again. Following an Allied victory, the Jews of Europe, we are confident, will be restored to their political rights and to equality of citizenship. But they possessed these rights after the last war and yet the past twenty-five years have witnessed a rapid and appalling
deterioration in their position. In any case, even after peace is restored Europe will be so ravaged and war-torn that large masses of Jews will elect migration to Palestine as a solution of their personal problems. Indeed, for most of these there may be no other substantial hope of economic, social and spiritual rehabilitation.

The freedom which we have faith, will come to all men and nations after this war, must come not only to Jews as individuals wherever they live, permitting them to share freedom on a plane of equality with all other men, but also to the Jewish people, as such, restored in its homeland, where at long last it will be a free people within a world federation of free peoples.

Of the 757 Rabbis listed below, 214 are members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform); 247 are members of the Rabbinical Assembly of America (Conservative); and the rest are affiliated with the Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox) or the Union of Orthodox Rabbis. The total represents the largest number of rabbis whose signatures are attached to a public pronouncement in all Jewish history.
Additional copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from the
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