

"Do you love my people?" - an end-time question to Christians

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The horrors of the twentieth century and God's concern for Israel

The twentieth century was certainly the most terrible century in world history. It brought immense suffering: human misery, wars and destruction, persecutions and the obliteration of many lives. The compulsion to destroy culminated in the Holocaust. It was a century in which many diverse forces were at work - human megalomania and delusion, satanic inspiration and deceit, divine judgment and grace.

With hindsight we can begin to discern God working salvation through the Holocaust, to an extent not seen since the days of Jesus and the Acts of the Apostles. The re-birth of the nation of Israel in the land of the Bible and the rise of the messianic Jewish movement are two works of God which fundamentally changed all world and church history - even though hardly recognized by the world and still insufficiently acknowledged even by Christendom. With these two deeds God demonstrated unmistakably that, in spite of all satanic and human rebellion, he is sitting on the throne and moving history on toward Jesus' return.

With the restoration of Israel as a nation, God challenges all peoples; with the beginning restoration of Jesus' congregation within the Jewish people, he challenges Christians even more. Do we understand God's aim in these challenges? How do we respond?

The king of the Jews and his people

As "king of the Jews" Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day. He gathered his disciples again and opened up Old Testament prophecy to them. On Pentecost, Peter proclaimed in Jerusalem that the risen Jesus was the messianic successor to the throne in Israel, who was promised to David. Later Peter and the other Apostles clearly understood that Jesus had come not only for the Jewish people, but for all mankind. The majority of the Jewish people rejected the Messiah Jesus.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the growing rabbinical Judaism declared the messianic Jewish movement heretical and excluded it from post-Biblical Judaism. This Jewish exclusion of the young Christian movement unfortunately did not lead to the response among heathen Christians which Paul had taught and hoped for. His extensive teaching on God's plan with Israel and the church, as well as his prophetic warning against heathen Christian pride (see Romans 9-11) were soon forgotten. The so-called church fathers completely distorted and trampled them with replacement theology. An anti-Semitic spirit flowed into the heathen Christian church very early in its history because this church longed for recognition from Rome. Its spiritual/historical link with Israel became an annoyance.

God allowed us post-apostolic Christians from the nations to change the king of the Jews into "our Savior and Redeemer". To put it more

sharply, Christianity extracted Jesus from the Jewish people and then rejected them. We wanted the king of the Jews but not his people. This heathen Christian "original sin" stamped church history from the beginning. For the Jewish people, the cross in European history has become a symbol of persecution and destruction. A shocking sign for this continual Christian delusion is the fact that the Nazis could cite the church father Augustine and the great reformer Martin Luther as witnesses for their anti-Semitic ideology and practice.

The Holocaust took place in the midst of an Occident under Christian influence. All of this is history which should never have taken such a course, atrocious history for which we can only be ashamed. We will not grasp the depth of this catastrophe of Christian history if we think we can a priori dismiss anti-Semitic Christians as not genuine believers, as some zealous Israel fans have done. The terrible thing about this is that an Augustine, a Luther and many other proponents of replacement theology were deeply committed disciples of Jesus. Throughout church history it was only a small band of believers who sensed or understood the divine path and divine truth in this central matter. This should be a warning to us. We still need revelation and grace in order to move beyond a Christian faith without history, a faith which is blind to Israel's calling.

The meaning of the Holocaust

The horror of the Holocaust has often led Christian and Jewish theology to either suppress "Auschwitz" or to consider it the end of all talk of a living God. For many Christians and Jews the Holocaust is too atrocious to have anything to do with Christian and Jewish failure and disobedience toward God. It is difficult for us to examine our own paths and those of our churches and nations in God's light, to repent and turn around. It is easier to accuse God or - based on our human emotions and thoughts - to question and deny his ways in history.

This is not new. Yet in the face of the Holocaust it has spread to an extent never known in Occidental history. What used to be a matter for especially critical spirits has now become the self-evident conviction of the man on the street. In Europe, faith in God is now largely treated as a private matter.

Questioning God in the blindness of our own hearts was never a path to a relationship; from the beginning it was a path to the destruction of a relationship between us and our creator (cp. Genesis 3). This path never leads to life. Without a turn-around, it leads to death. If we observe European Christianity, we must admit that since World War II its vitality and social meaning have greatly declined. Have they not melted like wax in fire?

Therefore Hanswalter Staubli formulated the provocative thesis, "The great majority of Christians lives as if there had never been an Auschwitz... Only when Christianity is able to give a credible answer to Auschwitz will it be spiritually armed to resist the de-Christianization of our society."

Of course the Holocaust cannot be explained superficially. It has many layers and it is a unique intrusion into Jewish-Christian history and relations. And yet, in all human failure and all satanic/demonic work, it is surely also God's judgment on a Christianity which has a strong tendency to anti-Judaism in theory and practice. Once we realize this, we also see that this anti-Jewish tendency is basically anti-Christian, anti-messianic, anti-divine. First the Bible's dynamic of salvation history was poured into dogmas with Greek philosophic roots, then history was secularized and finally faith was privatized. The concept that a living God works in history was already questionable; after the Holocaust it was conclusively laid aside by many Christians, especially theologians.

A Biblical defense which takes the Scriptures seriously as God's word, but nevertheless ignores its historical and prophetic strata, cannot help us further. Attempts are then made in the same superficial-rational way to extract from the Bible an exact end-time schedule, which must be revised every few years, usually without giving account. This does not increase trust in the Bible, but undermines it in the long run.

The post-Holocaust situation in Europe

There has been no revival in Europe since the Holocaust. In his grace, God has preserved faith; he has sent break-throughs and new movements, without which European Christianity might have totally decayed. There has been repentance for guilt toward Jews; with some Christians it was deep and strong repentance, but with most there has been little or none. The Evangelical Mary Sisters in Darmstadt, Germany, have given Christianity a shining example in their dedication and the depth of their repentance and reconciliation with the Jewish people. Pope John Paul II took some remarkable steps toward the Jews. In many churches there are new groups and works which are dedicated to reconciliation, understanding and support for the Jewish people and the state of Israel. These are encouraging signs. And yet a deep and continuing re-consideration of the relationship to the Jewish people has obviously not yet begun in Europe - neither in the general populace nor among Christians. Otherwise the relationship of European nations and churches to the nation of Israel would be different, likewise the relationship of Christians to the messianic movement.

I recognize that more repentance has taken place in Germany than the rest of Europe, probably because the guilt question is more urgent. But it remains to be seen how deep the process goes.

Unfortunately we must admit that on the whole, in spite of all the positive steps, myriad variations of anti-Semitism have greatly increased in Europe, influenced by the spirit of the times and by political circumstances. This clearly indicts the lack of extensive and abiding repentance.

When God's mercy does not lead to repentance, his judgment takes its course - at the time and in the way he determines. Basilea Schlink, of the Mary Sisters, helped us see more clearly when she said, "God gave over

to death what was closest to his heart, his only son, for our sins. Thus he proved for all time that he did the utmost so that he would not have to judge but could save his human children. But when this love is not only not accepted, but continually disdained and trampled upon, the hour of his wrath must come - otherwise hell on earth would become eternal." The Allies' total victory over Nazi Germany was such a judgment of God which prevented "hell on earth from becoming eternal".

What is the key to genuine change in this situation? I believe the key to a genuine heart change toward the Jewish people, both in personal and in the church's life, is repentance. It must be a repentance which is not misunderstood as a yoke of self-accusation and self-damnation, but which is recognized and accepted as a challenge of God's mercy. Such repentance leads to deep reconciliation, love and faithfulness toward Israel; it leads to new life for us and our churches. Jesus' path with Peter can make this clear.

"Peter, do you love me?"

Peter was overly self-confident about his relationship to Jesus. Jesus knew this and warned him of his denial. Peter thought it impossible that such a thing could happen to him. But in spite of the warning, this exaggerated self-assurance led blind Peter straight to denying his master. He brought massive guilt on himself and humanly speaking destroyed his relationship to Jesus. When he realized this he "went out and wept bitterly".

Jesus forgave him, but that did not settle the matter. After his resurrection Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15f). This three-fold question re-awakened in Peter's heart that deepest pain over his failure. Perhaps it kept the pain awake for the rest of Peter's life. What was Jesus' aim? To torment, accuse or humiliate Peter? No, he wanted to show him the path - the only path to take. Peter could have no abiding relationship with his lord but on this path leading away from himself and into a deep and unconditional love for Jesus. Jesus indicated how far this love must go when he prophesied to Peter, "When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18).

A time of testing for Christianity

We live in a period of salvation history in which God is wholly turning back to his people Israel after centuries of estrangement. He no longer allows the nations to do as they wish with Israel. He is testing them to see whether they will once again and conclusively abandon his covenant people or will regard justice higher than their own political and economic interests.

But God is also working on his people in all the political problems and helplessness. He is preparing his people so that the remainder of Israel

can recognize and receive its Messiah. Jesus, the Messiah-king of Israel, is revealing himself to his first-born people, his brothers according to the flesh.

It is a critical time for the churches from the nations. The Lord is testing our relations to the Jewish people. He is placing the history of the heathen-Christian church in his light. Many previous generations could not easily see what we now have before our eyes. God has turned back to his people and is beginning to reveal the Messiah Jesus to the remainder of Israel. For us Christians from the nations this is a kairos time for repentance (metanoia=a change of mind) in the comprehensive meaning of the word - a time to turn from all heathen-Christian arrogance, blind presumption and rejection of Israel.

We must realize that in the post-apostolic time a schism arose between Israel and the young church. For nearly 2,000 years this schism obstructed the relationship which salvation history intended. This would have been unthinkable for Paul, even though he knew from God that "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). But he could certainly not have imagined that only a few decades later the church would not only reciprocate rabbinical Judaism's enmity, but would dogmatize and cement it in the doctrine of replacement theology. Looking back to this catastrophic development one can ask who is more guilty - an Israel which hardened itself toward its Messiah or the heathen Christian church (through God's mercy grafted into the cultivated olive tree) with its enmity toward Israel. Should not **we** have known better?

At the latest, the Holocaust - which took place in the Christian Occident - should make clear that both movements which grew out of the old covenant people in the post-apostolic period (rabbinic Judaism and the heathen Christian church) are under God's judgment because they remained blind in decisive points and with their blindness obstructed salvation history. In his great mercy God kept them both alive and worked on them during the centuries of seemingly endless wanderings in the desert. I believe that Paul's word which terminates in his arguments in Romans 9-11 can also be applied to the disastrous history of the relationship between the church in the nations and Judaism. "For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Rom. 11:32).

God not only allowed this disastrous history, but it is now his plan to change it into good with those who allow themselves to be called. In our days he is bringing his people Israel and the heathen Christian church into a mysterious process of salvation, restoration and reconciliation. The nation of Israel still lacks knowledge of its Messiah. The heathen Christian church still lacks knowledge of God's salvation plan which includes Israel; it lacks inner unity as well. In our time God is working on Israel and on the church to remove these deep deficiencies.

Not only does the Jewish people need us, we need God's first-born Israel much more. We need the cultivated olive tree, the messianic Israel,

into which we are grafted. Our churches and movements are lying around in world history like branches which no longer have an earthly place to take root; therefore they also have no real mutual identity which could hold them together in their diversity. We strive for unity and revival, but there is no convincing unity and no effective revival. We strive to make our faith relevant for worldwide questions, for the problems and politics of our day, but there is little clarity regarding the aims of the creator of this world and the lord of history regarding Israel and the church. God calls us to turn around and re-orient ourselves according to his prophetic word and his divine plan of salvation.

"Do you love my people?"

God forgives us when we repent for everything we and our forefathers have done to his people and thus to himself. But this certainly does not settle the matter; it is only the beginning. He asks us, "You Christians, do you love my people?" He asks us not **once**, but over and over again, until our hearts deeply feel the pain of all the rejection, disinheriting, humiliation and persecution of the Jews in the Christian Occident, culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust. Does he want to torture us, accuse and humiliate us? No, he wants to show us the path - the only path to deep and genuine reconciliation with Israel. Without this reconciliation God will not bring his salvation history to an end.

Repentance is not a thing we have behind us when we wish to move ahead. It is not a path to damnation but a path out of damnation and into a redeemed life. It is the motor of reconciliation with our older brother and the compass on the path of love for God's people.

The more deeply we are aware of the guilt and the perversion of God's ways in Christian history, the more deeply will God reveal his mercy toward us heathen Christians; then we will see the extent of God's mercy toward the Jews. It is God's will and plan "that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you" (Rom. 11:31). The more fundamentally we recognize our guilt toward Israel and our total dependence on God's mercy, the greater and more unconditional our love for God's covenant people will become. For this love springs out of the father's forgiveness and reconciliation which in his son Jesus is for all men and all nations, "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16).

Dealing with the past sets us free for the future

It is not easy to face the process of dealing with the past. This is true of our personal history and it is no different in the history of our churches and peoples. My wife described how she personally experienced this. "Last summer I accepted the challenge to travel to Poland with a group of Germans and Austrians, three Poles and a few Africans. In Poland we visited six former Nazi extermination camps. Dealing over and over again with this past is strenuous, unpleasant, horrible, unimaginable. It brings pain and questions and the search for answers; it is simply heart-

breaking. If anti-Semitism increases again, will we be more resistant to deception than the Germany of that time?"

We live near Basle, only a few yards from the German border. During World War II it was closed off with barbed wire. One place was open; there many Jews entered our country (Switzerland), believing they were saved. Many, but by no means all were accepted. Today it is estimated that altogether 30,000 Jews were turned back at the Swiss border or later deported. Their lives usually ended in the Nazi extermination camps. I often walk along this border and think about the misery of that time. I am grateful that I can talk about it with my heavenly father. I want him to change me into what he has planned for me, for us Swiss Christians, for our people and for our relationships to the Jews in our country, in Israel and in the whole world.

Peter's denial is part of his history with Jesus; through God's mercy it became a motor for his loving relationship with his lord. In the same way, Christians' guilt toward the Jewish people is part of our history. Forgiveness of this guilt through divine mercy must likewise become the motor of our love for Israel and the impetus to grow closer to our messianic brethren. The deeper we recognize our guilt and the lostness which follows, the mightier God's mercy will be able to liberate reconciliation and love for his oppressed covenant people.

God's path has a goal

This painful path of repentance and reconciliation is neither an end in itself nor a kind of compensation for something which cannot be compensated. But it has a goal. On this path of reconciliation and love God wants to create the last church, which is the restoration and consummation of the first church. It will once again stand on the foundation of salvation history described in Eph. 2:11-22. It will once again be clear that we Christians from the nations are the original "far away" and the "Israelites" are "the near". Paul wrote of them, "Theirs is the adoption as sons; 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 Christ" (Rom. 9:4-5).

In this church Jesus has destroyed "the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and the nations. For Jesus came in order to "create in himself **one new** man out of the two" (Eph. 2:15). God never gave up this plan, even if it seemed to disappear during the centuries of church history. When this original schism is healed, unity among Christians will become the reality which until now has been so painfully lacking. Then the word regarding the church will be fulfilled, "The whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21).

If we understand this, it will be clear that God must take us through a powerful process in order to fulfill his plan. If we understand this goal and cling to it in our hearts, we will receive motivation, power and faith

to go through the process of transformation. In this process God creates a new identity in us Christians from the nations. Even though we already know that we are part of Israel, grafted into the cultivated olive tree, the incarnation (i.e. the earthly realization) of this divine idea is just beginning to germinate. In some messianic congregations in Israel, where Jews and Arabs meet together, serving and loving one another, something is already visible. But in order for this divine idea to become full earthly reality we must grasp in faith that it is God's will and way; we must devote ourselves to it in thought, prayer and deeds.

And Israel's politics?

This question has to come. For we live in this world, more precisely in the media world in which the deeds and mis-deeds of Israel almost daily accost our ears and eyes. Thank God there are other information sources which are not one-sided and biased. They present us the historical background of the Near East conflict, as well as Israel's extremely delicate and difficult political, human and military challenges. Today it is an obligation for Christians to utilize such sources. If they draw their knowledge, information and opinions (!) regarding the state of Israel, its history and politics solely from the "normal" media, we should not be surprised if they are absolutely unable to gain a spiritual view of this matter. (1)

Let us look again at the Nazi period of Germany because we must learn from it. At that time many Christians were totally blinded because they lacked a biblical-historical understanding of the Jews. They attempted to keep their faith private. But since they had no spiritual world view, they easily fell prey to political-ideological Nazi propaganda. Nazi racial theory, clichés about "rich Jews", world conspiracy theories ("Protocol of the Elders of Zion") and more were able to deceive them - if not wholly, yet to the extent that they were incapable of responding.

The latent old anti-Semitism developed a new "scientific" form of racial theory which gave it such a terrible persuasive power that it can only be understood as demonic. It is surprising that this demonic dimension of the Nazi party is seldom discussed, even by theologians. Henriette von Schirach, the wife of Hitler's youth organization leader Baldur von Schirach, gave a disconcerting testimony which showed that even non-Christians could discern this dimension in Hitler. In 1943 she returned from a visit in Holland, where she had witnessed the deportation of Jewish women and children. In her shock, she thought that what she was seeing surely took place without Hitler's knowledge. When she returned she confronted him personally with what she considered a disgraceful experience. Before she felt his anger and massive rebukes, she observed the following, "He turned his face to me. Only now did I notice how it had deteriorated. In spite of concentrated vitamins, his skin seemed old and his eyes extinguished - the demons consume him, I thought, although this idea seemed a bit strange to me."

In spite of the calamitous lesson of the Nazi period, Europe has seen no lasting return to the God of Israel. On the contrary, humanism - which Europe has chosen as the basis of its future - continues to empty itself of Christian content and now, like every vacuum, it attracts everything which proffers to fill it. How blind and naive is humanism, including the Christians inspired by it, regarding Islam! How easily it moves around humanistic Europe! And it is now fundamentalistic Islam which bears the demonic torch of anti-Semitism. This is not only the same anti-divine power, but many of its anti-Semitic precepts and lies can be traced directly to the Nazis.

If we cannot or will not acknowledge the satanic dimensions of anti-Semitism, we will cling to psychological and political categories, without noticing that the changing outward forms of anti-Semitism are fed by the same concealed sources. The Nazis' racial theory of anti-Semitism is no longer effective. Instead, the islamic-religious form is highly active and a political-humanistic anti-Semitism is becoming clearer in the western world. Perhaps this will ripen into the final form of anti-Semitism, from which the anti-Christ could be born one day.

This background helps us understand that Israel's politics are often acts of desperation, a human search for a solution where there is no human solution, a struggle for survival against another satanically inspired and planned attack on its existence. It is surely not our responsibility to criticize Israel for its mistakes. We should stand by this people and this state for God's sake, because God is taking Israel on a path and is carrying out a plan, even if we don't understand the details. We need not defend Israel's politics through thick and thin but we should declare truth and God's calling over this people. We must love this people because we belong to them and we long for the day Jesus will reveal himself to them so that his kingdom can come. Who else will Israel - in its spiritual battle - still have at its side as friends and advocates, as intercessors and comforters, if not the committed Christians who have seen what matters?

The end-time mystery: "All Israel will be saved"

In this time and in these ways God is preparing us to participate in his great salvation works, as Paul proclaimed, "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, 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 so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:15). When this happens, new life will be born in Israel and in the church from the nations. "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15). It will be something colossal which surpasses all our powers of imagination, which we cannot explain rationally. We can only believe and confess: We who have been called in Christ participate in God's covenant with Israel. We are bound with this people and their God, redeemed through the death of their Messiah. We believe in the God of mercy and of judgment,

the God who shows his great faithfulness and power not only in our personal life, but for his holy name's sake in his covenant people Israel as well, even though the majority is not yet redeemed. We trust him that he will continue to the end the path promised to his people in the prophetic word of the Bible. We will serve them on this path with our prayers, our testimony, our lives and our dedication. We are seeing the beginnings of something which will come in fulness: He will transform his people into a saved people. Then it will be the first-born among the nations to receive the Messiah when he returns to this earth. As Jesus prophesied, "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt. 23:29).

Paul says that the end-time salvation of Israel is a mystery, i.e. something we can grasp only in faith from God's word. God himself acts. Human politics can bring no definite solution because this is a matter of God's plan and goal with his people. But through all the human errors and confusion God will continue his plan step by step until he reaches his great goal. Therefore we must keep God's prophetic word deep in our hearts. We have no way "to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). But we should be his witnesses and stand by his people even if this brings us disdain or persecution.

The prophet Isaiah was shown that not only his prophetic words and signs were a message to his contemporaries, but even his very life and that of his disciples and children. He describes this in 8:16-18, "Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him." We want to preserve the mystery of Israel's salvation in our hearts and bequeath it to our physical and spiritual children. We too are waiting and longing for the Lord. But at the same time we are also witnesses that in our time "the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ" is being increasingly revealed to his people.

The messianic Jews as sign and symbol in Israel

Isaiah continues, "Here I am, and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who dwells on Mt. Zion." And the messianic Jews are signs and symbols in their people and their land for what God will do with his people.

Benjamin Berger's testimony of how he came to believe in Jesus the Messiah of Israel is impressive. He saw this personal experience as an anticipation of the future revelation of the Messiah in Israel. "I can testify from my own life that I would never have believed in Jesus on my own. I was so far from God! But the Lord encountered me in his grace and mercy and revealed himself to me. I was totally shocked when it happened. Jesus - for me? This was completely strange to me. I considered Jesus the God of the Christians who had nothing to do with us Jews. But when I encountered him I realized that this is our Messiah! This is my God! I had a 'Jacob experience' and in the spirit I saw God face to face. I received a new name; I was no longer 'Jacob' but 'Israel'.

"When this happened I sensed that **this will be the collective experience of my people. We will recognize him, we will see his face.** (emphasis: Christoph Meister) It will be like looking in a mirror. When we see his face we will see our own face because he is Israel's identity. This is God's great mystery: Jesus Christ, Jeshua haMashiach, is Israel in person. When we see him we understand the mystery of Israel. It is in his face. He will give us this national experience, which we are approaching. It is something colossal."

If we take seriously Benjamin Berger's report and similar experiences of other messianic Jews, we will see that the messianic movement obviously has a key position in God's plan of salvation. We live in a very exciting time in this regard. Let us keep our eyes open! Just as 1948 was a key year for Israel as a nation, 1967 was a key year for the messianic movement. That was the year Benjamin Berger had his "Jacob experience".

Robert Wahrer wrote of that time, "God gave a real new beginning after the re-unification of Jerusalem in 1967. Thousands of Jews all over the world, from varying backgrounds, turned to Jesus their Messiah and savior. From that time on they set their hope for Israel and the world in him. Many different congregations, which developed independently, were born in Israel. From this new beginning a movement was born which grew continually; today it includes congregations and groups all over Israel. They have become a public factor in Israel. Their life and service reaches far beyond Israel's borders."

When we non-Jews recognize and acknowledge that the twigs of the old fig tree are getting tender (Matt. 24:32), we must ask ourselves what this means for us. Are we simply spectators who sceptically or enthusiastically observe what God is now doing with his old covenant people? Or do we have a responsibility and a calling which in a deep way has to do with our identity as heathen Christians?

Our Jonathan calling

First of all, we emphasize that after the centuries of heathen Christians' ingrained erroneous paths regarding Israel, we must learn to walk in the opposite direction. In other words, we must learn to swim against the anti-Jewish tide of our heathen-Christian influences and traditions and against the anti-Semitic stream of the godless/humanistic spirit of the times. When we are willing to do this, God will lead us further into our end-time calling.

If we study the story of Jonathan and David we will see a prophetic path, as well as encouragement for our relationships with our messianic brethren. But we will also find a prophetic warning. It is moving, encouraging and sobering to read the story in this light.

The heathen Christian church as a religious institution is in danger of moving away from God's salvation plan because of its disobedience and blindness; it is in danger of drawing its nourishment from religious/humanistic and esoteric/occult sources, as King Saul did.

Although Jonathan was King Saul's son and his human successor, he surprisingly did not consider David, whom God had chosen, an enemy and competitor. On the contrary, "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" (1 Sam. 18:1). This is our calling in regard to the young messianic movement. God wants to use us "long-established" and "recognized" Christian believers in order to make a covenant with the old/new shoot of God's kingly reign - a covenant of friendship and love.

Jonathan had a conflict with his father because he knew that the God of Israel would not continue his plan of salvation with his father Saul, but with David (cp. 1 Sam. 20). We, too, encounter resistance from our churches when we defend Israel's theological relevance and the messianic congregations' key position in God's plan of salvation. Whether "our father Saul" - the institutionalized churches with their theological dogmas - will turn around or continue its erroneous path to the end, as the historical Saul did, is still open.

The last meeting between Jonathan and David is disturbing. David is fleeing from Saul. "Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God. 'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You shall be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.' The two of them made a covenant before the Lord. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh" (1 Sam. 23:166-18).

I believe that the conclusion of the Jonathan-David story is a warning for us heathen Christians. "Jonathan went home." He then remained faithful to his father until their miserable death together, although he himself knew and had told David that it was his calling to be "the second" with David, i.e. to reign with him in the new Israel. We cannot imagine how different the story - not only Jonathan's, but also David's - would have been if Jonathan had been faithful to his calling. We know the lonesome David, who never had a real friend even when he was fleeing from Saul, nor later on his throne. Were not his aberrations in large part due to this lack of genuine brotherhood and friendship?

We know about his moral lapse with Bathsheba, his inability to bring up his sons, etc. What meaning, strength and fruit the covenant between David and Jonathan could have developed if with God's help Jonathan had carried it out in deed! The best gifts and abilities of Saul's family would have flowed into David's life and reign through this friendship; how good they would have been for the "man according to God's heart," who was also a man with many weaknesses.

May the Lord help us believers from the nations accept our calling to courageously and lovingly support Israel, stand in the gap for Israel and live in this covenant of faithfulness and solidarity with our messianic brethren. Then the world will see that we are disciples of Jesus Christ who prepare the path for Jeshua haMashiach, the king of the Jews and coming lord and judge of this world. (2)

God's love seeks incarnation. It took earthly form in Jesus and wants to become visible on earth in Christ's body. Then it will no longer be simply an idea, a word or a thought between the two parts of mankind - Jews and heathen. It must take visible form on earth, for our God is the lord of history. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). He asks us heathen believers, "Do you love my people? Are you willing to love my people as you love your own life?"

(1) Examples of information from Israel:

- "Israel Today" (monthly news magazine): <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/> □
Christian Friends of Israel: <http://www.cfijerusalem.org/>
- International Christian Embassy: <http://www.icej.org/>

(2) I want to call your attention to the Jonathan-David relationship between Pastor William Hechler and Theodor Herzl. This amazing friendship decisively contributed to the Zionist movement's breakthrough in 1900, as well as to the founding of the nation of Israel. Claude Duvernoy's book is available on this web site. See Bibliography: The Prince and the Prophet.

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