

# Musings on Jerusalem and Rome

— DAVID PERK

Religions are more readily inspired and initiated in deserts than in towns. In the desert man is central. He faces there alone the truth of unreined nature and of his own being. He depends on his native abilities to supply his uncomplicated needs and there is little other than he himself creates that can protect him from the perils surrounding him. He has not the support of numbers, the artifices created by their special skills and the resources of provision and equipment that feature town life. His survival rests with him. The desert makes him lord over it, but it reminds him at every turn and moment that his reign is as temporary as the sands beneath his feet: they rest for a moment and move on. In the desert there is nothing to conceal the truth of his being from him, that though he is all-important to himself and the limited community which shares his life, his centrality is accidental, provisional and temporary. He can never overlook his puniness and dependence on Providence. In the desert he is close to nature, the truth of his being and the Providence that gives and sustains life, and his daily life is an awareness of the truth of nature, his own being and of Providence, that is of the very essence of religious experience.

By contrast, in cities man belongs to the crowd and is surrounded by an artificial world built by the generations of man. As a result, he loses his immediate and intimate contact with himself and nature. He loses centrality, as he becomes a cog in the machinery of the town. Where he is not a centre, the self has so little that is unique and meaningful that it becomes hard to find an ultimate meaning in existence.

Life in an industrialized society reinforces a nature that feels trapped in an irretrievable life situation and that sees no worth-while purpose in living. If there is no searching for and knowing a transcendent life the despair of meaninglessness reigns unchallenged. It is a predicament that overtakes man in the city mass and living conditions and confronts him with a lifeless self and a dead God.

## IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM

The gnarled, grey mountains that look upon Jerusalem in passive and ageless testimony and the hot and barren desert that reaches to its feet remind the onlooker that time has not altered their nature and meaning, that within their compass and embrace man discovered himself and found God, and that it remains, as it always has been, a hallowed venue for the meeting of man and God. It was not mere chance that made Jerusalem the cradle of three great religions. It was the nature-made sanctuary to which the dwellers of the desert and the mountain could turn for refuge and respite from their daily toil and agony. They brought their knowledge

of God with them, and in community of those who gathered there set up places of worship and sacrifice where they could commune with God, in praise, thanksgiving and penitence. In desert and mountain God was an inscrutable, inaccessible host to men, in Jerusalem man sought to reduce God to known ways and moods and to render Him accessible to man, according to his desires and needs.

The passionate interest and feeling that Jerusalem evokes in Jewry reflects an unbroken spiritual orientation and attachment that traces back into misty antiquity. From all parts of ancient Israel the Israelites turned their eyes to Jerusalem in prayer, as Jews all over the world do today, and three times a year they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jerusalem gathered and held them together. When it was destroyed and Jewry was scattered over the Roman Empire it remained their spiritual centre. Their loyalty to and yearning for Jerusalem became part of their Jewish thought and consciousness and was incorporated in their religious devotions. It became a beacon that kept the light of ancient fulfilment and future promise shining through the darkness and despair of the years of exile, and the longer the exile grew the stronger the yearning for Jerusalem grew.

Old Jerusalem today carries more physical association with the Christian and Moslem faiths than with the Jewish, Moslems and Christians come to their shrines in Jerusalem to rekindle their faith and to pay homage to the founders and saints of their faiths, and then return to their homes

all over the globe. These faiths originally spread from Jerusalem and the surrounding country to the ends of the earth, to the homes of men and women all over the world. The Jew, in the beginnings of his history, brought his religion to Jerusalem, which became his capital and spiritual centre. When the Jew today returns to Jerusalem it is to his spiritual home and historical beginning. Christians, for the most part, come, refresh their spirit and return to their scattered homes, leaving sentinels to guard over their sacred places.

## ROME: MUSEUM OF OUTDATED RELIGION?

The wave of Christian fervour that established the churches in the Holy Land in the early centuries of the Christian Era rolled on to Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire, and motivated the skill and art of Rome to building the magnificent churches that abound there. Rome took up the living story of Christianity where Jerusalem left it off, but the aura of sanctity that attaches and surrounds the Christian shrines in Israel, evoked by their historical significance and by a structural primitivism that they have retained, yields, in Rome, to aesthetic and technical responses that tend, if momentarily, to eclipse the feeling of sanctity.

The artistic and architectural masterpieces of Rome's churches arouse an aesthetic and intellectual response that tends to blur the religious response. They have become monuments of past achievements and moods, religious and aesthetic, to the multitude. The present generation may be awed by the spectacle, but is not immediately religiously inspired by it, it seemed to me.

There are many economic and historical circumstances that have converted a not inconsiderable portion of the Italian population to Communism. It may be true that the Communist philosophy does not oppose religion. Nevertheless, in revolting against the established order and vested interests Communism not only comes into conflict with the church and its clergy but with all that the church stands for. Whatever the attitude to religion Communism may posit theoretically, in practice it is atheistic; and in Italy,

as elsewhere, adherence to Communism spells divorce from the church. The number and the splendour of the churches in Italy and the social and spiritual services they and their clergy render the Italian people have not prevented the establishment and spread of Communism in Italy.

In Europe, and no doubt also in other parts of the world, the church of ancient foundation and history, as an institution, no longer claims the active support and close association of more than a minority of the community it serves. The masses, if they are not anti-church and anti-clerical, do not feel that the church, with its dogma rooted in past history and religious experience, echoes to their current mood and needs. There exists universally today a vague religious feeling and need that has not yet found adequate formulation and expression. This will not come about until modern terms, modes and venues are constructed to capture the imagination and interest of the masses.

The dogmas and procedures of the Catholic Church, which it has regarded hitherto as fundamental and unassailable, are being challenged by forces both inside and outside the church. It can no longer hide within its venerated past and structure from meeting the pressures and urgencies of the lives of its members. The more it comes to recognise and subscribe to the needs of the individual that derive from his membership of a politico-economic society that has no direct dialogue with the church, and that in fact resents and resists any attempts by the church to influence its course and goals, the less influence spiritually will it exercise in the lives of men, and its churches will come to figure more as archives and museums and less as places of meaningful worship.

### THE CHURCH AND MODERN SOCIETY

The machine age has reconditioned man to a type of thinking more in conformity with the machines that dominate him, has spread before him a wealth of recreational interests that absorb his surplus energy, titillate his curiosity and divert and preoccupy him, so that his capacity and time for faith has become abbreviated. The educational impetus which has been accelerated by the requirements of the machine age has moreover made him rethink values which ruled the lives of his forefathers. The social problems created by the massive aggregations of human beings in industrial cities

have increasingly drawn attention to inter-human relationships, and man's relationship to God has received less thought and consideration. Affiliation to the church and participation in its activities has waned, and the withdrawal has been helped by the anonymity which cloaks the individual in the crowded cities.

City life no longer revolves around the church, and the church, especially of old foundation, is in danger of becoming more a hallowed museum than a focal point of religious interest and influence. If religion is to play a meaningful part in the life of the townsman it will not be so much through the church in its traditional ways and rôles as through the social conscience that it has helped to promote through the centuries. It will come to be expressed more and more in the ways and affairs of the community and less and less in the church, its dogma and ritual. It is not accidental that when the Italian moved away from the church he moved towards Communism. In its ideal aspects, viz., the equality and community of man, it follows a parallel course to religious thinking, but in its sacrifice of the individual to state interests and goals it parts company from it. The influence of the Church, attenuated though it has become, has nevertheless played a part in preventing a runaway adoption of the Communist philosophy by the Italian people, and it may yet play a bigger rôle in this regard, as disenchantment with Communism grows.

### MODERN ISRAEL AND HISTORIC JUDAISM

When the early settlers reached Palestine, the name that area bore before it became independent Israel in 1948, they found no established industries and big cities waiting to engulf them. There was no established social order to oppose experiments with new living and social techniques. They were free to organize a way of life that suits the mood of modern man, seeking escape from the tyranny of the machine and the economic straitjacket it imposes on him. They sought to evolve a way of life that combines self-affirmation with shared security, dignity and peace.

The communal settlements which the early settlers founded in Israel were inspired by the ideal of sharing responsibility, duties, rights and living conditions, without favour or discrimination. Though their programme and operations reflected a considerable

social advance on the pattern of life in the cities and countryside of the Western world they had left behind them to settle in Israel, and had common ground with Communism in its basic idealism, they were free of the messianic Weltanschauung and persecutory defensiveness that characterises communistic body-politics. They were certainly opposed to the tyrannous imposition of a central will on the masses, that is the most demonic aspect of communism in action.

Many factors produced a movement for Jewish national revival toward the end of the nineteenth century, after two thousand years of exile. The oppression of the Jews in Russia and the pogroms perpetrated against them in the 1880's and subsequent decades aroused a yearning in them to find a place of refuge and a life of renewed hope and meaning in their ancient homeland. The movement was also helped by the unconscious fear of the loss of identity when the religious impulse that sustained it through the centuries of exile began to wane, in common with the universal decline of the religious inspiration and way of life. The threat to the ego of the individual in the transformation of society from a rural, church-oriented one to an urban, industrial and commercial one, that was taking place at the time, further reinforced their urge to find a new home and a new and meaningful way of life.

The new settlers were motivated by the urgent desire for national and individual reconstruction and reaffirmation and sought fulfilment of it through a practical philosophy of individual and social life that was inspired by the social conscience that has its roots in the Judaic religion and tradition. This motivation and inspiration continues to remain the key-notes of Israel's upbuilding today. The extensive industrialization and urban growth of Israel may conceal the underlying social leitmotif, but it is very much there.

Israel, or, a large section of it, may not slavishly observe the religious ways of its orthodox ancestry, but its socio-economic and political life represents the adaptation and application of historic Judaism in the context of a modern, highly mechanized and industrialized community. Israel has evolved a pattern of life which, while utilizing the skills and knowledge of modern technology, ever keeps the individual, his dignity, interests and rights in sight.

Technological progress tends to

stultify the individuality and humanity of man. It challenges the hitherto religious outlook and the established politico-economic structure of society, and directly and indirectly it has encouraged the growth of irreligion and communism, to the extent that man's way of life and his very image are under threat of radical change. Jerusalem, which gave the ancient world a pattern of life and outlook that has supported mankind to the present, has once again been vouchsafed by history the occasion to evolve an answer to the current philosophies that menace our further advance along the path that our forefathers, with the aid of God, made through the wilderness of life.

### CHRISTIAN FAITH AND SOCIAL ACTION

The controversy in the church over social action, wrote the editor of *The Presbyterian Journal* (U.S.A.), has come about "because too often a proper action has been replaced by an activism which is not a true response to the Gospel, nor obedience to the Gospel."

While he recognized that the Gospel commits Christians to an active concern for the poor, the downtrodden and disenfranchised, for justice, righteousness and peace, the editor said, "Helping the poor has become, for some clergymen, not merely an adjunct to the Gospel, but a substitute for the Gospel. They do not labor to relieve poverty and misery because first of all they are religious people. **This is their religion!** It is not love growing out of a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ that has constrained them, but a humanitarian concern for the plight of people."

"Social activism" he continued, "is seen wherever the Church enters the social arena without the Gospel; the coffee house where good fellowship prevails but never an evangelistic testimony; the 'experimental ministry' which works for good housing but not to win people to Christ; the boycott of business firms through Project Equality and other means, to secure social justice only. Of such according to the Bible, is not the kingdom of heaven."

(R.F.S. News Exchange).

## Letters — Briewe

### GESPREEK OM DIE WAARHEID

Nico van Loggerenberg, V.D.M., Postbus 246, Benoni.

Ek wil my dank betuig vir die openheid wat *Pro Veritate* handhaaf om my briewe met 'n redaksionele byskrif te plaas en u vriendelike aandag word gevra vir die volgende.

1. *Wegge! uit. Sien „redaksionele byskrif“.*

2. Waarom handhaaf die Redakteur die misleidende siening van:

„Apartheid is 'n pseudo-evangelie — in openlike konkurrensie met die Bybelse heilsboodskap — waarvan ons geen heil kan verwag nie? Apartheid is tog 'n verouderde en statiese begrip wat lankal met die huidige en dinamiese beleid van eiesoortige, gelykwaardige ontwikkeling op staatkundige vlak vervang is, en die kerk worstel lankal met die Bybelse gedagte van differensiasie en eiesoortigheid. Om hierdie rede is die redaksionele artikel *Die „Tragedie“ van Suid-Afrika* 'n „tragedie“, want dit hou nie tred met die waarheid nie. Dit kan ook nie op waarheidsgronde verdedig word nie, maar op hierdie „pseudo-evangeliese“ redeneertrant kan die Redakteur nog lank voorttoer.

3. Die vergesogte en humanistiese Skrifverklaring oor „die Christen en die burgerlike hof“ is 'n ewe groot „tragedie“. Dit gaan tog nie hier om 'n humanistiese spitsvondigheid of die burgerlike howe nou Christelik is of nie. Dit gaan hier om die *Bybelse waarheid en imperatief* dat die „onregverdiges“ die burgerlike regspraak verteenwoordig, al is dit vandag geheel anders, en dat die „heiliges“ die gemeente (kerk) verteenwoordig en dat die heiliges hul regsake in der minne moet skik. Die skrywers van hierdie spitsvondige artikel kan tog nie sonde (laster) met sonde (ongehoorsaamheid aan die Bybel) regverdig nie. Matt. 18:15-18 skryf tog die Bybelse weg voor en 1 Kor. 6:1 gee aan die heiliges as eksklusiewe lewensverband 'n bevel wat gehoorsaam moet word. Daarom moet die hele betoogtrant as 'n stuk onverwerkte en Skriflose humanisme verwerp word, en moet dit Bybels gehandhaaf word dat mnr. Beyers Naudé en prof. A. Geysers geen By-

liewe grond ter regverdiging van die hofgeding kan aanvoer nie. Meer gehoorsaamheid aan God beteken meer gehoorsaamheid aan sy Woord. Daarom moes hulle eers die Bybelse weg uitgeput het voordat hulle die burgerlike hof genader het.

4. Dit was ook vir my interessant dat die Redakteur die onwetenskaplike en histories onjuiste skrywe van mnr. J. A. Duigan sonder 'n redaksionele byskrif laat verbygaan het. Is die Redakteur tevrede dat mnr. Duigan die waarheid deur middel van *Pro Veritate* vergeet, om die Protestantisme te verketter? Het *Pro Veritate* nou 'n propaganda-medium van die aanmatigende en Bybels-vreemde Roomse geloof geword? Die onverdraagsame bitsigheid van mnr. Duigan is 'n tipiese voorbeeld van die Roomse misnoeë teen die Protestantisme, die onbybelse mensgeloof van Rome teen die Bybelse geloof van die Protestant. Daarom moet die sogenaamde frontverandering van Rome en sy konsilie met 'n ware Christelike Skrifgehoorsaamheid van die hand gewys word en die „pseudo-evangelie“ van „eenheid“ en „saam-wees“ van die humanistiese ekumene moet verwerp word.

Miskien verdien die gedagtes van „iemand soos ds. Van Loggerenberg“ nie 'n ou ruimtetjie in *Pro Veritate* nie, en tog sul dit waardeer word indien die redaksie met die openheid kan voortgaan, want 'n gesprek om die waarheid is altyd vormend en leersaam. Daarom dank ek u vir die opname hiervan.

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Op die sake wat ons korrespondent opper, antwoord ons kortliks soos volg:

1. *Ons volstaan met ons beslissing van verlede maand. Die eerste punt van sy brief is derhalwe heeltemal weggelaat.*

2. *Die antwoord kan gevind word in die inleidingsartikel waarna verwys word. Lees dit asseblief weer.*

3. *Die skrywers handhaaf hulle standpunt en verwerp die beskuldiging wat teen hulle gemaak word. Voorts raai hulle ds. Van L. aan om af te sien van sy „eksklusiewe lewensverband“-gedagte. Dit is nie alleen onrealisties nie maar berus ook op 'n misverstand van die Bybelse heilsboodskap. Verder staan dit vas dat niemand hom hoef te kwel dat hy „sonde“ gedoen het as hy beskerming van sy reg verkry het by dié instan-*