

SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE:

THE VATICAN AND ZIONISM

THE VATICAN'S ATTITUDE TO ZIONISM UP TO THE END OF WORLD WAR I

by

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Of all the powers that had an interest in Eretz Israel, the Vatican's rights there were the oldest and no less the real for being of a purely religious nature. The Vatican's influence there was mainly felt in its religious protection of Christians, which function had previously belonged to the French and was a bone of contention there between Italy and France. A lesser known aspect of Vatican's policy in Eretz Israel is its attitude to Zionism. For hundreds of years, the Catholic's sole interest in Eretz Israel had been to safeguard Catholic rights over the holy sites, which were periodically threatened by other Christian denominations and by the Ottoman government. And at the beginning of the twentieth century the Vatican found itself face to face with Zionism. The Vatican's attitude to Zionism was also influenced by Christian theological philosophy in relation to Jews, which was largely at the root of Catholic antisemitism.

The Vatican's first contact with Zionism came in 1904 when Theodor Herzl applied to the Vatican for a statement which would declare the Vatican's approval of Zionist aspirations. Herzl, received first by Cardinal Merry Del Val and then by Pope Pius X, was informed by both that while nothing would be done to prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem, nothing would be done to encourage them as long as they did not believe in Jesus.

In August, 1914, Pope Pius X died and was succeeded on September 3, 1914 by Pope Benedict XV. Early on, Pope Benedict XV showed no particular concern over Eretz Israel but it was known that the Vatican's interests in Eretz Israel were of long standing and the Zionist leaders appear not to have done enough to win over the Vatican's approval, until Nahum Sokolow, the representative of the Zionist Organisation in London, consulted with the Pope in 1917.

Before being received by the Pope, Sokolow first met Monsignor Paccelli and Cardinal Gasparri, the Vatican's Secretary of State, both of whom expressed concern over the Christian holy places in Eretz Israel and the

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Vatican's rights there. Gasparri told Sokolow that the Church intended asking for reserved areas which would include Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and the surrounding area, Tiberias and Jericho. Sokolow assured them that the Jews would stay outside of the areas that included the holy sites and Gasparri wished the Jews good luck in the establishment of a Jewish state. On May 4, 1917, Sokolow was received by Pope Benedict XV who, while expressing sympathy for the aims of Zionism and approval of British presence in Eretz Israel, at the same time voiced concern over the Vatican's rights over the holy places. He made it clear to Sokolow that the question of the Christian holy places was to be decided upon between the Church and the big powers to the exclusion of the Zionists. Sokolow assured him that the Christian sites would be respected and that the Zionists would bide by any agreement concluded in regard to them. To which the Pope replied, "I think that we shall be good neighbours". The Pope's concern for the Jews of Russia may have accounted for his sympathy for Zionism. Further, it is possible that the Pope may have possessed information that enabled him to judge the status Britain was to hold in Eretz Israel and the part the Zionists were to play.

As if to emphasize his concern for the holy sites, the Pope established a new department in May, 1917 which was to deal with the churches of the East. This was Congregazione dei Ritti Orientali.

The Balfour Declaration was signed on November 2, 1917 and General Allenby occupied Jerusalem on December 9, 1917, both of which caused concern in the Vatican, Britain immediately assured the Vatican that the holy places in Jerusalem would be respected.

On December 28, Pope Benedict XV received De Salis, England's diplomatic representative to the Vatican. The Pope expressed his satisfaction at the British presence in Eretz Israel and sympathy for the Jews but he spoke openly on his fear that England might relinquish its supervision which would be to the detriment of the Christian interests there. In addition, the Vatican had thought that the Jewish homeland would not include Jerusalem or the other areas of the holy sites though recent events pointed to the contrary. From that time on, i. e. from the Balfour Declaration, the Vatican became as hostile to Zionism as it had been at the time of Pope Pius X.

In June, 1918, Meli Lupi di Soragna headed a delegation to Eretz Israel which was to represent Italian consular interests there until the Italian consulate could be reopened. This delegation was known for its anti-Zionist character. Early in December, 1918 Soragna cabled the Vatican from Jerusalem, that the local Christians were disturbed over the declaration in the United States, by Cardinal Gibbons, to the effect that the Pope was supporting the Jews' rights in Eretz Israel. The source of Gibbon's information is unknown but shortly thereafter, Pope Benedict XV made a public statement defining his stand in relation to Eretz Israel and Zionism at the *Con-*

ference of the College of Cardinals on March 10, 1919. British Foreign Office officials had tried to calm the Vatican's fears by promising to safeguard the holy sites but these assurances came too late and by this time the Pope had already made his speech in which he said that it would cause him and Christianity great grief if non-believers had preferential status in the Holy Land and it would cause him greater grief if the holy sites that were so important to Christians, were to be in the hands of non-Christians. He said that non-Catholics were exploiting the aftermath of war to carry out atrocities there.

On April 2, Balfour cabled to the British Legation at the Vatican that if Britain obtained the Mandate for Eretz Israel, it would be responsible for the guardianship of the existing rights over the holy sites. These places would come under the protection of the Mandate government in the name of the League of Nations. The Vatican preferred this solution to a Zionist government since the Vatican's fears concerned the Church's interests altogether and not only the holy sites.

The Vatican's attitude to Zionism was becoming ever more negative for the following reasons:

- a. the fear that the Zionists would destroy the status that the Catholics had established in Eretz Israel over hundreds of years;
- b. the fear, shared by Britain and Italy, that the Zionists identified with Bolshevism;
- c. a lack of sympathy for some of the Zionist leaders considered to be too extremist.

Since the Vatican was unable to attend the Paris Peace Conference, it expressed its anti-Zionist views first through diplomatic channels and then openly and publicly. The three cardinals that visited Eretz Israel 1919-1920 openly expressed their anti-Zionist stand. It can be said in conclusion that, apart from the audience granted to Sokolow, the Vatican's stand in the first twenty years of the twentieth century, was consistently anti-Zionist.

Summary by Ruth Reich