

Sign of commitment

Beginnings of a theology of return

A theological vision on Israel as a nation, land and state should be based on the *calling and election* of Israel. This article analyses the theological developments in the Netherlands Reformed Church in ecumenical perspective.

By Dr. H. Vreekamp

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I still believe that the return of a substantial number of the Jewish nation to the land is a sign of God's trustworthiness. This belief does not rest solely on the bond between nation and land as promised by God in the Old Testament, but also on the fact that the return of the Jewish nation has once more regained visibility in history.

E. Flesseman-van Leer¹

The existing bond between the nation of Israel and the land of Israel can be described only in terms of love. That is because of the intimacy found in the triplet covenant, nation and land. I agree with (the Dutch poet and theologian, red.) Willem Barnard who says it is indiscrete for outsiders to interfere. When a Christian chooses to 'interfere' with the promise of the land of Israel, he should unceasingly evaluate the position of his bond with his own land. The blood and soil tradition of the Gentiles oftentimes had disastrous consequences for the Jewish nation in the Diaspora. When a European Christian becomes involved in the conflict between Jews and Palestinians, he should not forget – for instance – the brutal fighting, that lasted for many centuries, amongst Christians in Northern Ireland.

Bond of love

Christian 'intervention' should start while attentively listening to the Jewish voice expounding the essence of the promise of the land for Israel. When I read Rabbi Evers's article in this edition², I became quiet. The love for the land is intrinsic. The bond between the Eternal One and His people, and therefore between the people and the land, can be equated to intimacy in marriage. Open though a marriage may be, internally it is intimately anchored in love between the two persons.

I also noticed this basic principal in the article of rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, which was recently sent to more than a thousand ministers and pastors by the NIK, the organisation of Jewish communities in the Netherlands: 'The link between the Jewish people and the Jewish land can be compared with a marriage'. The crossing of the Jordan represents a marriage ceremony between the people and land. Then follows poetic descriptions of concrete love: about a covenant amongst rocky hills and sandy tracks with a people whose future destiny is bound up in the state and welfare of the land - even to this day. This bond is permanent. At no point did the God of Israel terminate the bond. The Eternal One is trustworthy. With that, all and everything has been said.

¹ *Retractatio*, in: *Evangelisch Commentaar*, 9/3, 8 Feb. 1991, p.12

² R. Evers, *Israël, een oud-nieuw land*. This article originally appeared together with the present one in *Israël en de Kerk*, year 1, vol. 2, Nijkerk September 2002. Also on this website: Israel, an old, new land.

The ‘marriage’ between people and land says everything about the God of the people and the land. He longs to bring His people into this small land and reside with them there while reaching out to all human beings, and to be their God too.

I remember an evening in Jerusalem in the late spring of 1997 when Moshe Idel, a well-known scholar on Kabala – the world of Jewish mysticism – addressed a group of theologians. He spoke about the bond between the nation and the land within the mystical tradition of Israel. Idel explained the meaning of the land in erotic terms. Heaven seeks for earth. The Holy Land is the object of the Holy One’s love, and allows itself to be loved.

The words touched us deeply. In other words, that is how you have to learn to speak about the relationship between the people and the land. In the words of Idel: erotic geography.

The land and other lands

However, when Israel and the land of Israel is beloved, what then about other lands... for instance the Netherlands? I asked Idel. His reply was that every country should be thought of as an *extension* of Israel. Therefore, the Netherlands as a colony of Israel, is what goes through my mind.

At a later stage I again read what Martin Buber said about this extension that flows from the centre of love: ‘The inhabited world forms a circle with the Holy Land in the centre. The centre of the Holy Land is Jerusalem, whose centre is the Holy of Holies onto which blessings from above are poured and flow all over.’³ Israel was elected for the sanctification of the whole world. That takes place from the centre, from Jerusalem. It flows from the particular to the general and never vice versa. All and any attempts to put Israel in the general category are doomed to fail. Israel is unique because the Name of the God of Israel, *echad*, is exceptional and unique amongst the gods.

Israel – nation, land and state

In her study document: *Israel – nation, land and state* in 1970, the Netherlands Reformed Church was the first in the ecumenical movement who dared to ‘interfere’ with the land promise of Israel. The only access to a theological vision on Israel as a nation, land and state, according to this viewpoint, should be based on the *calling and election* of Israel. The scope of this document is limited to the question ‘whether or not the state of Israel has a specific religious dimension for Christians’. Dr. Flesseman-van Leer points to the following: ‘The question this report wishes to answer is whether the Christian religion has anything to say about the recent Jewish state. The conclusion was that it might be possible only in a very indirect way. It is not accidental that, in the title, the state is mentioned lastly’.⁴ The state is mentioned only in the last instance. By implication, that does not minimize the undeniable meaning that the state of Israel has for Jewish self-comprehension. This centres on the belief of the church. A distinction has to be made: ‘Israel’s right to exist has indeed been based on the religion but is not necessarily a given’.⁵ The verb *based on* says it all. Because the acceptance of an own form of state for Israel is based on the eternal bond with the land according to the promise, this *eventually* rests on the basis of belief according to the document.⁶

³ *Over het jodendom*, Utrecht z.j., p.80

⁴ *Het blijvende Israël*, Six radio addresses, Amsterdam/Driebergen 1970, p.30. I think it is a pity that the triad *people, land and state* from the title of the study document has gained more popularity than the three aspects behind and underneath it: *covenant, people and land*.

⁵ *A.w.*, p31

⁶ Theological tension is present in the word *eventually*. The state as such is not a *theologoumenon*, but in the end it rests on religious grounds because of the bond between nation and land. I do not hesitate to defend the thought that this is an article of faith on which the church stands or falls. The eventual religious ground is the *ultimate* religious ground. On solid *ground*. (Heb. 11).

The study document should be read from the perspective of these limited questions. He, who wants more than that, asks for too much. The question is whether the Christian religion was *altered* by the events of 1948.

Now, let us take a retrospective look at what was primarily said by Dr. Flesseman-van Leer. In 1949, she tackled the theological challenge of the young state of Israel. She was the co (head)-compiler of the study document twenty years later and another twenty years later she wrote a *Retractatio* of the document. The word *sign* is the prevailing theological word.⁷

Guidelines – pre-history

At a Reformed Pastors' Meeting on April 26 1949 in Utrecht, Dr. E. Flesseman-van Leer used a word that would remain the recognizable, primary word in theological reflection: Israel was given to us as a *sign* from God. This type of language reminds one of a holy sacrament. There are signs of a *visual* reality, as well as an allusion to a future that *cannot yet*, be seen. That is what it sounds like less than a year after the Jewish state was born: 'Israel is the visual sign of God's grace that will never stop. I believe that the state of Israel is the concrete and visual *sign* that was given.'⁸

Israel and the Church

The 1959 Reformed Church study, *Israel and the Church*, says it is possible for the Church to see a group of three *signs* in the state of Israel, namely:

- a sign of our *helplessness* because so few Christians truly did all they could when Israel stood naked while being threatened.
- a sign of *God's loyalty* despite the disloyalty and unbelief of all people, and
- a sign that the people of God are taken by God from one trail *to another* and given a fresh opportunity to fulfil its election and all that Israel needs to find her Messiah.⁹

The study points out that Christians should keep it in mind that, for the Jews, a unity exists between national-political and spiritual-religious life. In reality, it means that a perpetual bond exists between the Jewish people and the land of the promise. This linkage of people and land does not rest on the pagan ideas of blood and soil, but on the revelation of God in His covenant with Israel.

The study also addresses the tension that is caused by the Jews and other nations co-habituating in the Middle East. That the mentioned nations see the habitation of Israel amongst them as a threat to their existence, cannot be seen separately from the charges against Christianity, regarding these peoples: 'Amid all the tension in the world, the Church is now being asked for her opinion on the problems with which the Arabic peoples are struggling, as well as the rights and significance of the state of Israel. The opinion has to be an unbiased and it is important to impress upon the Church the fact that she has *the same demanding responsibility* towards both the Jews and the Arabic countries.'¹⁰

⁷ I had many conversations with Ellen Flesseman about the promise of land and other subjects regarding the Church and Israel in the eighties. For a summary: H. Vreekamp, *Zonder Israël niet volgroeid*, Reformed view on the relationships between Church and the Jewish nation, Kamper 1992. I specifically wrote about the promise of the land in the collection for prof. Dr. H. Berkhof: *Christelijke geloof na 1948*, in: *Waar is God in deze tijd?*, The meaning of the history in theology of Dr. H. Berkhof, Callenbach 1994, p.103-125.

⁸ *De staat Israël, een theologische beoordeling*, in: *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 3/6, Aug. 1949, p.432.

⁹ Similarly, the Rheinische Landessynode of 1980 also used the language of the 'Zeichenhafte Analogie'.

¹⁰ *Israel en de Kerk*, A study commissioned by the General Synod of the Ned. Reformed Church, compiled by the Council for the relations Church and Israel, 's-Gravenhage 1959, p.39v.

The reformed study document

On the 16th of June 1970, the Reformed Synod accepted the study document: *Israel – people, land and state*.¹¹ Members of the synod requested a small ad hoc commission to draw up a report on the subject in 1969.¹² This was as a direct result of the 1968 World Council of Churches conference in Uppsala. The one sided manner in which a resolution about the conflict in the Middle East, was accepted, urged the Dutch delegation to unanimously send a letter of protest to Genève. The synodal board of the Reformed Church was of opinion that the question, whether Israel has any *theological* relevance, was of utmost importance to their own and other churches. The Synod presented the *study document* as an item with a non-negotiable character yet without the aim of being a destination. It should rather be a *basic principle* for reflection. In an exceptionally difficult dilemma, the document aimed at opening, but not closing, ‘a broader discussion which we at home, in sister churches in other countries and the World Council of Churches have been sorely lacking’.

The basis for this rests on, as stated previously, the perpetual confession of Israel’s eternal election and calling. The assumption, on that basis, is that the covenant, in which the election is realized, deems *the land* to be a fundamental element. This election and destination is aimed at the nations being acquainted with, and accepting the God of Israel as well. It is especially prevalent in the books of the prophets that Israel ‘could only genuinely realize their true destination as covenant people of God, in Palestine. And that the realization of this destination has been intricately linked to the salvation of the world’.

What is the current situation, with respect to the bond between land and people, in the New Testament? It does not specifically say that God sustains the bond between the people and the land, but neither is there anything to the contrary. And that should not come as a surprise: ‘... it is not spoken about because Christ does not cause a fracture in the relationship between the people and the land’.

With this, a *new* theologoumenon was communicated: a distinction between the Jewish and other people, whether explicitly or silently, is supposed in most parts of the New Testament also after Christ. These thoughts about Israel should increasingly be made fruitful. There is a fundamental difference between what Jesus Christ represents for the nations of the world on the one hand and for Israel on the other: ‘The Jewish people are called by Him to return to this God that established a bond with them from the beginning. Yet the nations are called by Jesus Christ not to a return to their origin but to something completely new in their history’.

The study document assumes that the Jewish people, as seen by us currently, is the continuation of the Israel that is mentioned in the Old and New Testament. And even after the last decision was made about Jesus Christ, this history continues.

Then the question, that of the state of Israel’s meaning for the Church, can be asked. It is clear that the promise of God, regarding the intricate and permanent bond between people and land, is not equally true for the bond between the nation and the state. The Jewish people lived in the Promised Land for centuries without any hint about an own independent state. The possibility exists: Israel as nation with a land, but without a state. The following must be said of the actual situation: ‘As things are at present, we see a free state as the only option that will guarantee the existence of a nation as well as giving the Jewish nation the opportunity of openly and freely being themselves. In the current circumstances, the Church backs the right of the state of Israel to

¹¹ ’s-Gravenhage 1970. *From the literature: S. Gerssen, Modern Zionisme en Christelijke theologie*, Kampen 1978, p.176-189. The formidable discussion that followed in the publication *In de Waagschaal*, lead to the demise of the publication. The dispute has been summarized in: *Wat het zwaarste weegt*, Articles from ‘In de Waagschaal’, Baarn 1971, p. 153-173. A clear contradiction to the Guideline is: *Geen plek om het hoofd neer te leggen*, Israel and the Palestinians, theological illumination of a political conflict, Baarn 1983.

¹² According to Flesseman-van Leer, in an elucidation of the Guidelines in newspaper *Kerk en Israël*, p.38-41.

exist on grounds of the exceptional position of the Jewish people.’ Mention is made of the relative necessity of the form of a state. The state of Israel will have an own dimension because of the Jewish people’s position in the will of God: ‘Israel has been called to set an example to the other nations by the way in which she lives in her own state’.

The *Epilogue* of the document contains a short and compact conclusion as to the Church’s theological opinion about the state of Israel: ‘Israel’s route is closely connected to the *expectation* of the Church and therefore, as Christians, we cannot remain quiet’.

In an edition of *Church and Israel* Dr. Flesseman-van Leer elucidated the document.¹³ She pointed to three theological questions that I think are still important:

1. Is it presently still allowable to *concretely discuss God’s historical actions* regarding His will and love etc? Do these human representations of God not lead to confusion regarding the true God that greatly transcends human thought and understanding? In a way, this report indeed discusses God as a matter of fact, in a certain sense. Behind this lie two basic truths:
 - (1.1) That the Biblical testimonies in the Old and New Testament mostly speak about God in a ‘childlike and naïve’ manner and therefore, by way of and through these human witnesses, the church again recognized and acknowledged God; and
 - (1.2) that it is no less adequate to discuss God in either simple ‘anthropological’ or deep philosophical terms. It is clear that the criticism of this report revolves around the question of God and the problem of how people talk about God.
2. Is it possible that the *central position of Christ* is undervalued and or even denied when one fails to see His birth, suffering and resurrection as an absolute breaking point in the history of the Jewish people? Is it not inclusive for Israel that nobody comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ? Here is a thought, that has not appeared in previous statements or communication of the church and that plays an important role in the document, is identified. The report does not deny the centrality of Christ’s position for both Jews and non-Jews, yet is of the opinion that Christ’s role for the two groups seems to be unequal. The non-Jews obtain access to God through Him; for them Jesus Christ therefore implies a wholly new phase in their history. The Jews, on the other hand, are *called back* to God by Him: for them Jesus Christ consequently does not imply a division, but a radical change of their previous history with God.
3. Is *election* not a far more dynamic concept in which God repetitively makes a choice, as opposed to a static concept of one nation having been chosen? Otherwise, ‘election’ becomes chosenness. And does election not become a privilege of God’s arbitrariness instead of a destiny for others?

Continued reflection

Dr. Flesseman wrote a *Retractatio* twenty years after dedicated co-operation in writing the study document.¹⁴ She said that the commission, at that time, was of the opinion that the enduring election of the Jewish people and the rejection of what is now generally referred

¹³ See note 11. A Biblical support for the Guidelines was given by Flesseman-van Leer in: *Het blijvende Israël* (see notes 3).

¹⁴ See note 1.

to as ‘replacement-‘ or ‘substitution-theory’ or supercessionism, was generally accepted in the Reformed Church and thus unnecessary to be argued at length. With hindsight these suppositions appeared to be far more disputable than we thought at the time.

After twenty years, Flesseman-van Leer confesses to being filled with shame about the church’s tone in 1970, when speaking about the Jewish people. She calls it a ‘presumptuous arrogance’ if we, the outsiders, are going to decide on the constitution of the Jewish identity... or not. Is it at all noticeable from the study document, that the Church speaking here has allowed herself to be beneficially interrupted by the Jewish voice? The intention can certainly not be that Jews should decide the Church agenda for the contemplation of Zionism, but neither can the intention be for Christians to arrogantly speak about Jews without speaking to Jews. Flesseman-van Leer states clearly that Jewish self-comprehension is not crucial for Christian theology, but she would like to see the instruction, ‘that whatever it is that Christians talk or write about, Jewish friends should be able to read and listen to every word’.

According to Flesseman-van Leer, the requirement of the addition to the document specifically involves the position of the Palestinian people. Discussions about the Palestinians in 1970 were one-sided and inadequate. In the meantime the voices of the Palestinian Christian brothers have reached the churches of the Netherlands. In that way the question of the promise of the land was handed to us in a partisan ecumenical sense, in which the connection between the people and the land of Israel will have a direct and radical impact on everyday life. The study document starts from the belief in which the re-unification of the Jewish people and the land is accepted. Flesseman-van Leer said in 1991 that she still believed that the return of quite a proportion of the Jewish people to the land is a sign of God’s commitment: ‘That belief rests not only on the bond between the people and the land that was promised by God in the Old Testament, but also on the fact that, by returning, the Jewish people have regained visibility in history. Her retraction has bearing on the previously expressed recognition of the state of Israel as a theological fact. Now Israel’s theological justification is dogged by a definite question mark. Not that the lines drawn from the Bible previously should be rejected, but the theological point of view of the document, on the basis of its ‘Wirkungsgeschichte’ seems to be incorrect. In practice, it seems to be used as an ideological defence of Israel’s inflexible politics. Flesseman-van Leer reaches a definite conclusion: the state of Israel is not a theological fact, but a political fact, and the acknowledgement thereof is not a theological decision but a political decision.

Continued reflection

In the meantime, the Reformed Synod decided on a continued reflection of the contents of the *Guidelines*. Not that the idea of ‘the sign of God’s faithfulness’ was lost. Quite the contrary. In commemoration of its 40th anniversary, the Reformed Synod conveyed a pulpit message in the Spring of 1988. The text thereof was decided on after consultation amongst representatives of the Synod, the Council for the relations of the Church and Israel, the General Council of the Church Welfare and Dr. G.H. Cohen Stuart, the theological advisor in Jerusalem. The text reads as follows: *As Reformed Church of The Netherlands, we thankfully remember that the Jewish people were ‘snatched like a burning log out of a fire’ 40 years ago, and could proclaim a state that is referred to as ‘the initial germination of our salvation’ in one of the Synagogical prayers.*

Being convinced that Israel is a sign of commitment given to the world by the Almighty, we acknowledge with responsibility and anxiety that elements which might hamper this state and people in cultivating this still vulnerable ‘shoot’

- deep-seated hatred for Jews
- hostile pronouncements of the international community

– *the unresolved battle for a legitimate place for the Palestinian people*
 – *the underlying discrepancies and internal strife about the character and future of this state.*

On the basis of our belief in the God of Israel, who is our God through Jesus Christ, we hope and pray that we, with the Jewish nation, can continue the search for righteousness and peace that is fair for the whole world and the Middle East in particular.

On November the 24th 1988 the Synod decided on continued reflection of Israel – people, land and state – based on God’s commitment to His people and in which the voice of the Christians in the Middle East is also heard. Around these crucial issues the instruction revolved. In the Spring of 1995 the result of the reflection was presented: ‘There is one matter on which we wholeheartedly agree: the coming of Christ does not mean that the election of Israel is a thing of the past. The New Testament clearly proves the contrary’. This is the standpoint of faith. This basis cannot be a matter for open-ended discussion. It echo’s the starting-point for every – imperative – continuous contemplation about ‘Israel’. The presentation of a common theological vision was unsuccessful. In the previous contemplation, two distinguishable theological lines of thought prominently figure alongside each other. In the one line of thought the persistent distinction between Israel and the nations, even after the coming of Christ, is pointed out. In the other line of thought, the accent is placed on the fundamental unity of Israel and the nations during and after the coming of Christ. I prefer the first line of thought. After all, ‘Christian universalism has been grafted onto Jewish universalism that goes forth from Jerusalem (according to Luke 24:47)’¹⁵

Continued reflection anno 2002

With the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Church had to attest to her said relationship with the Jewish people. With the inception of this state, the *sign* that re-appeared in the open field of history confirmed that *covenant, people and land* had been given to one another as a sign of the everlasting commitment of the Eternal One in what certainly must be ‘the strangest analogy of Easter in the history of the world’.¹⁶ ‘As if extorted from God by the abomination of concentration camps and gas chambers’. Nothing more and nothing less. Whosoever attempts to put the land in brackets because the relationship between church and synagogue is difficult enough without the addition of politics, pursues a relationship with the Jewish people that has literally been suspended in the air.

In the Spring of 1948 the Church, and theology itself, was asked to put their money where there mouth is. Between the Wannsee Conference in 1942 and the birth of the state of Israel in 1948, Jerusalem once again became a place from heaven on earth. The church had practically no traditions with reference to theological reflection on the ‘land’. When paging through the register of handbooks on dogmatics, nothing or very little – at best – can be found. With the return from exile, a new hermeneutical paradigm is unveiled. ‘A theology of return’ is required of the Church.

But - how difficult is this new question about Judaism for the Church. ‘Who can untangle this perplexity’ is the sigh uttered by Arend Th. Van Leeuwen at the end of ‘Christianity in World History’.¹⁷ He does not hesitate to call the new state of Israel unequivocally unique or a *sui generis*. ‘All simplifications or ideological viewpoints of Israel’s mysterious formation that

¹⁵ Pierre Lenhardt, *De betekenis van het land Israël voor christenen*, in: G.H. Cohen Stuart (editor), *Een bevrijdend woord uit Jeruzalem?*, In discussion with Jewish and Palestinian liberation theology, ’s-Gravenhage 1991, p.99.

¹⁶ O. Noordmans, *Gods venster*, In: *Gestalte en Geest, Verzamelde Werken 8*, kampen 1980, p. 322.

¹⁷ Hilversum-Antwerpen/Amsterdam 1966, p.381

we are confronted with, are damaging the complexity of the problem'. The Christian Church now faces a challenge that she managed to avoid for nineteen centuries - since the destruction of the Temple by Romans in the year 70.

I still believe that the core issue is addressed by Miskotte (Miskotte was professor of systematic theology at Leiden University) in his commentary 'Foundations and Perspectives of Confession'.¹⁸ The new accent is on the discovery of *history*. God meets us in history. In view of this, I analyze the contents of Miskotte's *Edda and Thora*, in which history is one of the occasions that divides the Torah from the Edda with its accent on cosmology. And in rediscovering history, the voice of a new element, that of Israel, is heard.

Miskotte points to a danger that was strongly emphasized by many of his pupils: 'Recently an inclination has taken root amongst some believers to replace the Holy Bible as the Word of God, with the belief that Israel are the people of God.'¹⁹ Miskotte thus observes a new form of paganism in the leaning towards Israel, 'In some circles of friends of Israel, people are fascinated by the congregation of nomads, those in waiting, the martyrs'.²⁰ A real danger exists that the Word, which is about this people and all creation and judgment, might be exchanged for the nation of Israel.

Miskotte also signals a second danger that, he says, is far more urgent compared to the first. And that is the conviction of the large majority of Christians that it is over with Israel. 'The people as a nation (apparently) have no national future in the 'state of Israel': as the people of God, and as carrier and distributor of the knowledge of God, they have been permanently eliminated'.²¹

Both these dangers threaten the Church. Between Scylla and Charybdis, she is trying to find her way. The Word of God creates and determines history. The people of Israel do not do that. But the God of Israel reveals Himself in that history. And that initiates a break between early and recent Christian dogmatic thinking: 'Israel, *that* is where we can read and find meaning (in the illumination of the Word), that is where we are truly allowed to picture the relationship between God, our King, and human beings - creatures and sinners'.²² These words were written by Miskotte after and in the light of the Six Day War in 1967. He writes: 'The imagery of the June war of 1967 assaulted us. The bilateral seizing up and weighing of movements, of underdog against underdog, was overwhelming. The readers, hearers and spectators were swamped with extensive scientific and journalistic revelation and it will be senseless to expect a pastor to find his way amongst these mountains of books etc. But, the preacher will absolutely and irrevocably know that Israel is the exceptional property of this God, the chosen son and elected herald. But also God's security for world politics. With discernment, we say that they are meaningful and might be the key to unlocking the secret of world history'.²³

When contemplating Miskotte's words anno 2002, my attention turns to the key word *sign*. The Church that accepts the sovereignty of God's word in history, and also wants to know how this word of God works in history, will have to show courage – I would say – to point to the *signs* in the expectation of God's Kingship. The Church has now been called to be accountable, with respect to Zionism. 'If ever the Church had a 'Commandment of the Moment', it is without a doubt that of accountability for Zionism'. 'I am of the opinion that the Church, in the twentieth century, cannot understand herself outside of this

¹⁸ *De kern van de zaak*, Nijkerk 1950, pp. 42-53; 242-253.

¹⁹ *A.w.* p.43.

²⁰ *A.w.*, p.243

²¹ *A.w.*, p.245.

²² K.H. Miskotte, *De verkiezing van Israël*, in: *Postille 1969-1970*, 21, 's-Gravenhage 1969, p.291.

²³ *A.w.*, p.289.

responsibility', says my teacher J.M. Hasselaar.²⁴ And I agree with him that theological accountability should continually stand guard over the three 'secrets' that implies the triple unity of: the *election* of Israel, the Word becoming *flesh* and the *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ We should look at the promise of the land in the brilliance of the triple radiance of the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The vantage point of all theological reflection on 'covenant, nation and land' must be *the election* of Israel. That is the viewpoint of 1970 and of today. God wants to dwell with the people and that is why He wants His people to enter the land.²⁶ This is what Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt says in the eschatological sections of his *Dogmatik (Dogmatics)* regarding the promise of land: '*God's future deeds are not under the token of the unlimited, endless and nameless, but rather under the token of His historically concrete bond with Israel, His people, and the city of Zion.*' Our future stands (or falls) within the framework of *the restoration of the Davidic Kingship*. Eschatology that does not recognize the 'Zionist motive', as Marquardt calls it, is shooting in the dark past God and His Names and places.²⁷ That's where it's at. There is no turning back and no other way. The 'dramatic focus' – according to Marquardt – between God and Israel is God's wish to bring His people to the land. And this promise of the land is not the condition for salvation²⁸ but rather the essence. God wants to live with His people, in the midst of Israel and, in so doing, amongst all His people on earth.

The Netherlands... a colony of Israel, of the city of Jerusalem. How do I share in the intimacy without violating it? By *confirming* the intimacy instead of denying or attempting to replace it. I specifically make use of the verb *confirm* because it is the cardinal word in the calling of Jesus Christ the 'Servant of the Circumcision': He *confirms*²⁹ the promise given to the fathers and therefore also the promise of the land.

Marquardt associates the promise of the land with Christology. Whosoever ponders the incarnation seriously, certainly cannot forget the land. This Christological breakthrough was mentioned previously by Gerssen. In 1976 he acutely saw what Marquardt meant: 'In essence it revolves around the understanding that the confession of the Word becoming Flesh might be subject to the danger of an idealistic misunderstanding if the reality of Israel, the nation and the land is excluded from this viewpoint'.³⁰ In thesis 8 of his dissertation, Gerssen agrees that the New Testament remains 'silent' about the promise of land because: 'When it is written in Romans 9:4 that the promise belongs to the Jewish people, the unity of the Word commands that the promise of the

²⁴ *Een woord in de Domkerk*, in: *Prof. dr J. M. Hasselaar - Al luisterend ...*, A selection from his work presented at his sixtieth birthday, 1977, p. 202.

²⁵ *Wegen en kruispunten op een oude atlas*, A didactical commentary on the 'Dogmatics of the Evangelical Reformed Church' of H. Heppe, Utrecht 1974, p.22 (stencil edition).

²⁶ This is according to the recently deceased leader on the area of the new 'Israel theology', Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, in the eschatological parts to his dogmatics about the promise of the land. See: F.W. Marquardt, *Was dürfen wir hoffen, wenn wir hoffen dürften?*, Eine Eschatologie, Band 2 Gütersloh 1994, p. 187vv. See the 'bookmark anchor' by Marquardt's Dogmatic of: Wessel H. ten Boom, *Alleen GOD kan spreken*, An introduction of the work of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, Kampen 1997, p.92vv.

²⁷ Wessel ten Boom, *a.w.*, p.91

²⁸ The hidden agenda of many Christians that are 'pro-Israel': the promise of the land as condition prior to the return of Christ.

²⁹ Romans 15:8. Next to the word *confirm* the NT also uses the verb *fulfil*. The second verb carries the risk that (pagan) Christians will hear and understand this as 'already done'. I quote H. van Praag about the Dead Sea Scrolls in this regard: 'We know, for instance, that the words in Matt. 5:17: 'I did not come to do away with the Law or the Prophets: I have come not to do away with or undo but to complete and fulfil them' should be read in this way: 'I did not come to deny the Torah and the Prophets but to confirm them' (*Wijsheid uit Oost en West*, Deventer 1974, p 150).

³⁰ S. Gerssen, *Het beloofde land*, in: *Grensverkeer tussen Kerk en Israël*, A selection from the work of Dr. S. Gerssen, 's-Gravenhage 1986, p. 178v.

land be included and understood'. Yet, this argument is not enough. It has been based on what appears to be a justified presupposition. Why not strongly base it on the heart of Christology...? The fragrance of the earth also clings to the incarnation. What does it mean to the Church that the fragrance of Galilee clings to Jesus? That in His resurrection, the land was *co-resurrected*? That we do not seriously regard the Word becoming Flesh if we do not include *the earth*? That Christ, as 'Servant of the Circumcision', has confirmed the promise – including the promise of the land - that was given to Israel, and *in that and no other way*, becomes the Saviour of the gentiles?³¹ Both Israel and the church Marquardt calls a restless cauldron.³² In that I hear the movement of the Spirit above the face of the abyss, the turbulent emptiness of the earth, the land. The outpouring of the Spirit rushes from Jerusalem to the ends of the *earth*. Poured out in the middle, the water of life flows to the depths of the end of the earth. Jerusalem, in the centre, *extends* to the four corners of the earth: we have to know, therefore, how to allow the continuous difference between Israel and the nations to become literally more productive. The promise of the land, given to Israel, will act as mirror to the nations for their own situation. And Israel, *pars pro toto* (*taking a part for the whole*), has been called not to live in isolation. Pneumatologically, continuous expansion takes place... and also the testing of every individual's own bond with the land and people, given the heathen origin of blood and soil. The horizon of history beckons instead of nature that is at rest. Marquardt says that the church, in dialogue with Israel, should stand on the side of the nations. Also, and not in the last instance, the Church's relationship with Israel is measured by her relationship with the Palestinian people. The election of Israel is a light to the nations. The sign of that light is written on the foundation of our history.

³¹ On April 9th 1991 I defended the following thesis was defended by me at a Pastors Meeting in Utrecht: *Every theological contemplation about "Israel: volk, land en staat" takes place in the historical context of the founding of the state of Israel as 'the strangest analogy of Easter in the history of the world' (Noordmans) and should be seen as an enduring distinction between the Jewish people and other nations even after the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore when in the new report the question 'whether the state of Israel has a special religious dimension for Christians' (Guidelines 1970) is asked, Christology should not be excluded in the contemplation. In concrete terms this will mean a penetrating confrontation with the Christology as developed by Naim Ateek in his Palestinian liberation theology. I am still of the opinion that this is where the centre of the theological question lies.*

³² Marquardt, *a.w.*, p. 187vv.