

The christian problem of Israel

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eigene Tat aufgefaßt wissen will! Es soll ein Dokument geben, in dem er äußert, er wolle auf der Judenausrottung seine Karriere aufbauen.

«Mag das persönliche Schicksal des einzelnen Unholdes — so schließt Dr. Linz — am Ende (gleichviel wie es ausfallen wird nebensächlich sein; dem *Kern* nach wird die Welt *doch* einen ‚Schau‘-Prozeß erleben; sie wird, in einem bis zum Übermaß fairen Gerichtsverfahren schauen, was sich *niemals* wieder auf dem Planeten ereignen darf.»

THE CHRISTIAN PROBLEM OF ISRAEL

By Dr. CHAIM WARDI, Jerusalem

Among the first Government agencies organized in 1948 was the Department for Christian Communities in the Ministry for Religious Affairs. The chief function assigned to it was to interpret Christian rights and needs to the Government and its various agencies, and to see that the religious requirements of the Christian Communities be satisfied. The architects of the State were aware from the very outset that with the establishment of the State a new problem emerged; a problem which would be not of a temporary, but of a permanent, an organic nature. Two facts, indeed, pointed in that direction: the presence in the country of a Christian population which, though small in numbers, was important in that it represented the chief varieties of Christianity; and the permanence throughout the Christian world of a keen interest in the Holy Land. This interest was of old standing, and in different periods it took on different shapes. In the years 1947—1950, it manifested itself particularly in the demand for the establishment of a permanent international regime in Jerusalem and its surroundings, which were to be constituted as a *corpus separatum* and placed under U. N. administration. The idea in itself was not new; it

had been mooted more than once in former centuries, and probably had its earliest prefiguration in the proposal of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, that the Holy City be made into a Moslem-Christian *condominium* under his own sister and Saladin's brother, wedded and reigning together. The modern proposal was surely less fantastic; but whatever its merits, it was shelled to pieces by Arab artillery during the siege of 1948 with the international community looking on. There were, however, other demands which could, and therefore had to, be given careful and considerate attention: demands regarding the Holy Places, the status of Church institutions, the historical rights and privileges of the various Churches. Christian interest was also manifest in the concern shown for the future of the local Christian population. But this, most of us thought, was to become our own responsibility. It was by no means felt to be a simple issue. After centuries of existence as minorities, we suddenly found ourselves in the position of a sovereign majority with minorities on our hands. How were we going to tackle this problem, how would we treat minorities? It was no mere question of skill or tactics: it was primarily a moral issue.

Briefly stated, practical answers had to be found to the following correlative questions: how to integrate the Christian population into the life of the new State without impairing its precarious security; and how to respect the historical interest of World Christendom, without inviting encroachments on the sovereignty of the State. — There was also a third, and broader, issue which occupied our minds: that of the renovation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, with its possible effects on the situation of Jews living in Christian countries. But this issue surely could not be made the object of direct governmental initiative.

After twelve years of endeavours to find solutions and apply them in various situations, the Government and the people of Israel are still faced by the above two problems. It is, moreover, clearer today than in 1948 that they must be realized by the whole nation and become part of its moral and political outlook. For no policy regarding minorities can be carried into effect without the intelligent support of the people among whom the minorities live.

To grasp the problems in their concrete bearings, and the solu-

tions attempted by the Government, a few historical facts should be recalled.

In 1948, according to the first census, there were in Israel 32 315 Christians, of whom more than 95 per-cent were Arabs. Today, owing to natural increase, repatriation, and immigration from Europe, they number more than 52 000, out still about 85 per-cent of them are Arabs. In describing Israel Christians as "Arabs", we usually imply that they speak Arabic; that they have lived for many centuries among Moslems; that some of their intellectuals have been eloquent spokesmen for Arab nationalism. On the other hand, however, their connections with this country are older than those of the Moslems; their co-existence with the latter has seldom been of a satisfactory nature; their Arab Nationalism, which is rather an intellectual construction than a matter of instinct or historical self-consciousness, has never commanded the allegiance of the majority. The definition of Israel Christians merely in terms of Arabism is therefore inadequate and even misleading. A deeper insight into their essence can be gained by considering them as part of those larger Christian groups which have lived for centuries scattered throughout the Middle East.

The ancestors of these groups, in the early period of the Christian era, were all members of the same Church and subjects of the same Roman Empire of the East. Almost all of them used the same languages in their daily life or religious services. True, the unity of the Church was broken as early as the fifth century, and the Eastern provinces were lost by the Byzantine Empire to the Moslems in the seventh century. But when the tide of Islam subsided and the Christians of the East re-emerged as an archipelago of scattered islands, they were all reduced to more or less the same status of "protected Communities" or *millets*. The long annals of these Communities record but little of an inspiring nature: they tell in the main a long dismal story of human groups confined to a marginal existence, exposed to oppression and persecution, isolated from the rest of the Christian world, divided among themselves. The Crusade interlude brought not lasting relief to them. Only the nineteenth century witnessed a kind of revival among these Christians, which was mainly due to the closer European interest

in Near Eastern affairs. Two ideas in particular were to kindle new hopes in their hearts: social emancipation and nationalism. Surely, only few could think in terms of a Christian National State; the many cast their lot in with their Moslem "brethern", and thus Christians of the Levant became promoters and propagators of Arab nationalism.

When we first came in touch with the Christians of Palestine, their attitude was anything but hostile. On the contrary, members of their middle class quickly realized the economic advantages that would derive from cooperation, and close commercial relations were established between Jews and Christians. But as soon as Arab nationalism proclaimed its war against Zionism, a number of Palestine Christian notables joined the Moslem leadership, and their contribution was to prove of great consequence. They contrived, in fact, to stir interest and sympathy for the Arab cause in Christian circles throughout the world. Surely, their influence on the local Christian population was not very great, and this may account for the fact that a far smaller percentage of Christians than Moslems left the country during the Arab exodus in 1948. Still, many did leave — especially from among the wealthy, the educated, the politically minded. When, after the War of Independence, we found ourselves face to face with the Christians of this country, only the people and the clergies remained. . . .

To these Christians Israel granted the status of free and equal citizens. At the same time (perhaps remembering the Jews' own struggle against "assimilation" in the various countries of their diaspora), steps were taken for the preservation of the religious-national peculiarity of the minorities as well as for the defence of their freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture. As a result, the minorities were able quickly to recover and resume civil and political life. Already in the first years of the State's existence we see them associate and vote as they please, develop a press of their own, serve on local and municipal councils, elect and be elected to the Parliament. Arabic, from the very outset, has been proclaimed one of the two official languages.

Despite their common Arabic language, Israel Christians are by no means a homogeneous group. They belong to different

Churches and consequently to different Communities. A "Community" in the Near East, is a much more complex organism than in the West. It is a religious as well as an ethnical entity; almost a small nation constituted as a Church and moulded by it. Its supreme leader is usually a Patriarch, who is both a High Priest and an Ethnarch. His jurisdiction, which in former times extended over nearly all domains of his subjects' relations, is now confined within a narrower sphere; but he is still the head of a supreme ecclesiastical court which decides not only in strictly religious affairs but also in matter having civil effects. The territorial boundaries of his jurisdiction usually embrace an ancient ecclesiastical province, of which Israel is only a part. Since none of the Patriarchs has his seat in Israel, grave perturbations in the ecclesiastical life and administration were liable to ensue. Nothing of the sort occurred. The Government of Israel preserved the system of Communities and recognized the jurisdiction of the Patriarchs over their followers in this country. Moreover, the Patriarchs and their representatives were given freedom to enter and leave the country at will, and to exercise here their pastoral and other functions. Thus the rulings of the Patriarchal courts, especially in matter of personal status, although given abroad, are recognized by Israel law and, therefore, binding upon the members of the Communities living in Israel.

The most ancient Community in the country is the Greek Orthodox. Its 17 000 souls, headed by an archbishop — the Metropolitan of Nazareth — are members of the autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, which embraces both present Israel and Jordan and traces its origins back to the times of Jesus. A characteristic feature of this Church is that, whilst the laity and lower clergy are predominantly Arab, its higher clergy is almost exclusively Greek. This situation is a source of frequent internal tensions which, however, are chiefly felt in the Jordan part of the Community.

In close touch with the Greek Orthodox in Israel is the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission. Established in the middle of the nineteenth century for the purpose of strengthening Orthodoxy in the Holy Land and defending it "against Roman and Protestant

encroachments", this Mission exercised a profound influence on the life of the Orthodox Communities in the Near East, until it was discontinued in 1914. At present, owing to the changed situation, its functions are considerably reduced and apparently confined to the liturgical sphere. The Greek Orthodox Community of the Holy Land, which for many generations enjoyed the sympathetic interest of the Church and State of Tsarist Russia, and which in Mandatory times was patronized by the Church of England, is now primarily the concern of the Greek State and Nation. The latter, which includes not only the Hellenes of the present Greek State, considers it its sacred duty to protect "the Greek Race's imprescriptible rights of ownership over the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Holy Shrines of the Holy Land¹" against any non-Hellenic encroachments.

Of comparatively recent origin, but by far more vital and active is the Roman Catholic, or as it is called in the East, the Latin Community. This counts some 10 500 souls, including about 800 priests, monks and nuns. Only in part of Arab background, this Community is headed by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, who resides in the Old City but who frequently visits Israel as part of his diocese. To assist him in his pastoral work, a vicar with episcopal rank has recently been appointed with residence in Nazareth. The Catholic Church maintains in Israel a large number of charitable educational and other institutions, all of them run by religious orders and congregations. The most renowned are those in the charge of the "Custody of the Holy Land", a Franciscan organization which for the last six centuries has been engaged in guarding the Catholic Holy Places and attending to pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. But also well known are the Carmelite monasteries, the Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition, the Biblical Institute run by the Jesuit Fathers, the schools of the Frères and the Sisters of St. Joseph, the various institutions of the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of St. Charles, and many others.

The largest Christian group in the country is the Greek Catholic,

¹ The quotation is from a Memorandum submitted in 1923 by the Archbishop of Cyprus to the Palestine and Polish Governments.

or Melkite Community, numbering about 19 000 souls. Its origins go back to the seventeenth century, when a number of Greek Orthodox Syrians seceded from their Church and united with that of Rome, while keeping their Byzantine ritual and the use of Greek and Arabic in their ceremonies. Their Patriarch resides in the Lebanon and is represented in Israel by the Greek Catholic Archbishop of Acre, Haifa and all Galilee. Owing to its close associations with the Roman Catholic Church, this Community is well organized and well disciplined. Under the able leadership of its present pastor, it has made great strides since the establishment of the State: new churches have been built, orphanages opened, seminaries established.

In communion with Rome is also the Maronite Community, some 2 700 strong and concentrated in several villages not far from the Lebanese border. The Maronites follow an ancient Syrian ritual and use Syriac and Arabic in their liturgy. Their Patriarch, too, resides in the Lebanon. Being under the direct jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Tyre, Israel Maronites frequently receive visits of their pastor and other dignitaries who are permitted to enter this country directly from the Lebanon at a frontier post called Rosh Hanikrà.

The Armenian Community counts about a thousand souls, all of them members of the Armenian (Gregorian) Church of Jerusalem. Their Patriarch, who resides in the Old City, is represented in Israel by a vicar. The Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem is in communion with the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin (in Soviet Russia), but is almost completely independent in his ministry.

The Coptic Community, only about 600 strong, is of Egyptian origin and obeys the Patriarch of Alexandria. His representative in the Holy Land is an archbishop residing in the Old City who also exercises jurisdiction in Israel.

There is further a tiny monastic Community of Ethiopians (who, like all Eastern Christians, claim very old connections with the Holy Land) and a few score of Syrian Jacobites.

Reformed Christianity came late to the Holy Land and only in the second half of the nineteenth century could a number of Greek Orthodox converts to Anglicanism be constituted in Evan-

gical groups. Some of their descendants today form the Arab Episcopal Community of Israel, about a thousand strong, which is under the direct jurisdiction of the newly created Anglican Archbishopric in Jerusalem.

Reformed Christianity is also represented here by a number of minor protestant groups and agencies which, being mostly of foreign and recent origin, do not enjoy the status of "Communities". This obviously does not prevent Israel Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists and others from freely practising their religion and developing their activities. Even the various and numerous missionaries are free to pursue their endeavours, whether among Jews or Arabs.

In fine, a tiny group of "Hebrew Christians" should be mentioned, some 300 strong, who try to create a Hebrew form of Christian worship and thus revert to the condition of the ancient Judaeo-Christian Community, which had been condemned and eliminated by the ancient Church Universal more than fifteen centuries ago.

* * *

From this short survey, it is clear that several important changes have taken place in the numerical and proportional strength of the Communities. We have already mentioned the absolute increase of the Christians by about 20 000 souls; we should add here that the proportion of Christians to Moslems in Israel is now far larger than in Mandatory times (they constitute about 25 per-cent of the entire non-Jewish population). A further important change is that, whilst in Mandatory times the largest and most important Christian group were the Orthodox, at present the leading group are the Catholics with their 19 000 Melkites, 10 500 Latins and 2 700 Maronites. Needless to add, these changes may affect both intercommunal relations in this country, and our general relationship with the Christian world.

The Communities enjoy considerable internal autonomy. They own property and administer it freely. Their religious leaders and other officials are elected or appointed without Government inter-

ference. Matters of personal status, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, alimony, etc., are within the competence of their clergies and ecclesiastical courts. They often conduct their own schools or, if they so desire, take advantage of Government or foreign schools. In Government schools, religious education is provided (free of charge) according to the request of the parents. There are at present in the country more than 50 Christian schools with some 10 000 pupils, including 1400 of the Jewish faith. Each Community has its own churches and holy sites. The most renowned Christian holy places, such as Golgotha, the Holy Sepulchre or the Grotto of the Nativity, are all on the other side of the border; and thousands of Israel Christians cross twice a year to attend ceremonies in the Old City and in Bethlehem. But among the nearly two hundred churches in Israel, there are also many well known shrines, such as the birthplace of John the Baptist in Ain Karem, the site of the Annunciation in Nazareth, that of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor, the place of the Dormition on Mt. Zion, the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem, the Tomb of St. George in Lydda, etc. All these places, treated with deference and respect, kept open and easily accessible, are the indisputed possession of one or another Community. *There is therefore no "Question of Holy Places" in Israel*, with the result that inter-communal relations in this country are perfectly satisfactory. The Christian clergies are treated with courtesy and with all the regard due to their rank. They are invariably invited to take part in public manifestations, whether national, cultural or other. Many among them read and speak Hebrew and contribute through their scholarly work to the cultural life of the country.

Israel's Christian policy has been essentially liberal. It was inspired by the desire to abstain from exercising any undue pressure — whether religious or cultural — on its minorities, and by a sense of deference towards the Churches to which these minorities belong. Surely, also by the hope that this treatment would help its Christian citizens to become integrated into the life of the State.

With what results?

It is perhaps too early to speak about results. Twelve years are not sufficient to reform inveterate attitudes which had crystall-

ized in the course of many centuries. The results are therefore not very apparent. The Vatican, for instance, has not yet formally recognized Israel... But there are, no doubt, beginnings of a revision in the attitude of the Catholic Church both towards the Jews as a people and towards the State. We shall not insist here on the amendments to certain prayers introduced by the present Pope: they are probably the effect of other causes. More symptomatic perhaps are such facts as the exchange of courtesies between the President of the State of Israel and Pope John XXIII on the occasion of the latter's election; or the presence of an Israel delegation at the ceremony of the Pope's enthronement; or the conferment of a Vatican decoration on an Israel Ambassador. Most significant, in fine, should be considered that attempt made by several Franciscan Fathers, headed by a Custos of the Holy Land, to revise the ancient "popular belief in the so-called prophecies concerning the non-restoration of the State of Israel²"; a revision which reached the conclusion that there was no contradiction between the prophecies contained in the Gospels and the political renaissance of Israel³, and which led to research on the origins of such a belief or doctrine and its diffusion and crystallization⁴. The fact that inquiries have been instituted into the genesis of positions held almost as dogmatic may well be considered a sign that the ice has been broken. — Besides, the most apparent "thaw" occurred in the domain of the concrete relations between the ecclesiastical and the Government authorities in Israel. Here, the good will and the practical intelligence of several Catholic prelates have greatly helped to permeate these relations with a spirit of trust and friendship. It may also be recalled in this connection that for the

² S. Muñoz-Iglesias O. F. M., *El origen de la creencia popular en las así llamadas profecías concernientes a la no restauración política de Israel*, "Estudios Bíblicos", Madrid 1951, n. 10.

³ Father Giacinto Faccio O. F. M., *Sionismo e Sacre Scritture*, "La Terra Santa", 1950, pp. 78—86.

⁴ Father Augustus Spijkerman O. F. M., *Afrahat, der persische Weise und der Antizionismus*, "Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus", V, 1954—1955. See also a review of the above study in "Christian News from Israel", Jerusalem, 1956, Vol. VII, n. 1—2, p. 38ss.

post of Latin Patriarchal Vicar-General, a prelate with episcopal rank has lately been appointed in this country. This may be due merely to the greater importance attached by the Church to the increased Latin Community; but it may also reflect its increased consideration of the State of Israel.

Greater readiness to revise their doctrines and attitudes of the past is to be found in a few Protestant Churches. There are in fact Protestant theologians and historians who, in the renaissance of the State of Israel, seem disposed to acknowledge a fact of providential value and therefore deserving of theological interpretation. The nineteen centuries of Jewish post-biblical history are thus raised into the sphere of sacred history, and the "rejection" of the Jewish people with the relative system of theologico-historical concepts is practically negated. Clearly such a revision, whilst on the one hand reopening the great and forbidding problem of the significance to be attributed to the two thousand years of Jewish suffering in the world, on the other hand prepares the basis for a more intimate reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity, between Israel and the nations. However, when several years ago the formulation of the necessity of a revision was placed before a famous assembly of (prevalently Protestant) Churches, pragmatic and utilitarian considerations prevailed over the theological and moral motives, and the formulation was indefinitely postponed. — This does not deny the fact that there are hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions, of Protestants who watch the events in Israel with their Bible in hand, ready to discern in them the realisation of this or that promise or prophecy. It is only to be regretted that this interest and sympathy is conditioned by the desire or the expectation of a more or less wholesale conversion of the Jews to Christianity. One should expect on the part of friends — *ad maiorem veri Dei gloriam* — a more disinterested interest.

Most rigid in its traditional positions and, therefore, most impassive and reserved towards the State of Israel, is the Orthodox Church. In front of this attitude, one is led to believe that for this Church, Zionism and Jewish renaissance belong to that chaotic and transitory world of *becoming* for which it would be vain to

seek a significance. Ancient Judaism, indeed, did have significance and value; as a result of sin, however, it decayed and became part of the world of non-being, i. e. of the one that *ought not* to exist. A view that is upheld in that rigid "orthodox" fashion which — at least to an outsider — seems impenetrable to any breath of living thought or fact. — This, again, does not preclude excellent relations between the State and the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, nor ties of friendship between Orthodox prelates and Israel personalities, nor even the presence in Jerusalem of a Representation of the Church of Russia: *the* Orthodox Church, which has hitherto turned upon Israel the mutest, the most impassive, the most icon-like face⁵.

It is also too early to draw sweeping conclusions on the reactions of Israel Christians to the policy of the Government. The following, however, may be pointed out: in the last twelve years — amidst threats, incursions and bloodshed — the Christians of Israel have remained perfectly quiet; they showed no particular nervousness during the Sinai campaign; violations of State security have been very rare among young Christians; the number of Christian volunteers in the Army and the Policy Force is on the increase; many Christians encourage their children to learn Hebrew; not a few of them send their children to the Hebrew University and other institutes of higher learning; no subversive party, whether pan-Arab or Communist, has been able to gain a foothold among them. At the same time, Israel Christians show a disposition to adapt themselves to the change in social and economic conditions, and

⁵ There is news from Greece, however, that bodes well. At the beginning of this year, professor Hamilcar Alivizatos of the Theological School of the University of Athens sent forth an appeal that, at the initiative of the Oecumenical Patriarch, all passages inspiring hatred against the Jews be immediately removed from the Greek Orthodox liturgy. Among the reasons adduced, was the consideration that there was an Israel State in the world. . .

A few months later, the Primate of Greece himself made a declaration against anti-Semitism, as being "sacrilegious, degrading to our civilization and, furthermore, anachronistic. . .", recalling that the Old Testament came from the Jews; that Christ was incarnated as a Jew and that the Apostles and the first missionaries in Europe (i. e. in Greece) were Jews as well. (See "Christian News from Israel", Vol. XI, No. 1, p. 8, No. 2, p. 5.)

to profit from the advantages offered them by the trade-unions and other labour organisations of this country.

Nevertheless, it would be imprudent to over-estimate these signs. Palestine Christians have for many years been exposed to Arab nationalistic propaganda administered to them not only by Moslem agitators but also by presumed friends from England and America and more recently from Russia. Their contacts with Jewish and Israel realities have been of too short a duration to allow for conversion to the idea of the State of Israel. The word "conversion" is used here on purpose. For no real re-orientation will be possible in this sphere without a certain change of heart. Life in Israel is hard and shabby and dangerous. Happy is only he who is able to see a meaning in his effort and sacrifice, to learn to love it, to pay the heavy taxes with one's eyes on something transcendent. Integration — also of Jews — requires a previous acceptance of a common ideal. This, of course, is by no means impossible. But — and here we come to the crucial question — in view of what should our Christians join us? What have we to offer them? — Neither the myth of a Christian State nor that of an Arab Empire. All we have in store for them is a share in a well ordered polity allowing for higher forms of moral, intellectual, and material life: ideals of peace, better living, social justice, and human decency. Justice and decency, first of all, towards our minorities. It will seem a paradox to some and a truism to others, but it should be repeated on the present hundredth anniversary of Dr. Herzl's birth: the degree of integration of our minorities will depend upon the moral quality of the state that we are building. Without remaining true to the ideals which have guided us hitherto in the upbuilding of Israel society and statehood, Herzl's vision of a symbiosis may not come true.

Surely we also need some time. But time that should not be allowed to pass in vain. Our Christians should profit by it to acquire consciousness of themselves and of their real interest. The clergies of the various Churches could make a valuable contribution. For who is a better position than they to realize what so many Jews of Israel already are keenly aware of: that both they and their neighbours live here in a frontier country, beyond which

the desert begins: the vast continents that know not the Bible nor the God of the Bible, nor the concepts that are at the basis of what to us is human civilization. In other terms: that both Jews and Christians in Israel have a common heritage to cultivate and to defend.

ZUSAMMENARBEIT DER RELIGIONEN?

Ein Bericht aus Israel

Von HANS KOSMALA, Jerusalem

Ende vorigen Jahres brachten zahlreiche Sendestationen der Welt ein Fernsehprogramm, in welchem sich Ben-Gurion, der israelische, und U-Nu, der frühere burmesische Ministerpräsident, in einer Unterhaltung über ihre Religionen — Judentum und Buddhismus — und die damit verbundenen Lebensanschauungen und sittlichen Forderungen zusammenfanden. Man kann nicht sagen, daß diese Unterhaltung in die Tiefe ging. Das war auch nicht zu erwarten. Das Bedeutsame daran war, daß hier zwei führende Staatsmänner ihre religiös-sittlichen Einstellungen grundsätzlich auch als Verpflichtung zum friedlichen Zusammenleben der Menschen untereinander geltend gemacht haben.

Daß Politik, sowohl Innen- wie Außenpolitik, sich im Rahmen gewisser international anerkannter ethischer Grundsätze zu bewegen hat, wird in der heutigen Welt als selbstverständlich angenommen, wenn auch Machtpolitiker und Diktatoren sich oft darüber hinwegsetzen. Die Frage ist hier nur: welches ist die Autorität, die den Menschen zu den ethischen Grundregeln im Zusammenleben der Einzelnen und der Völker verpflichtet oder an sie bindet? Wo ist sie zu finden?

Der erste, der im Abendland den Versuch gemacht hat, die Ethik und alle sittlichen Tugenden von der Metaphysik und der Theologie zu trennen, war Aristoteles. Aber diese Abtrennung einer «reinen» Ethik hat sich praktisch nie ganz behaupten können.