

# REMARKS ON FR. MARCEL DUBOIS AND THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN ISRAEL

by JEAN GUEGUINOU

On October 9, 1985, at a ceremony held at the French Consulate in Jerusalem, Fr. Marcel Dubois was awarded the Order of Knight in the French Legion of Honor by the French Consul-General. The Editorial Board of *Immanuel* and the Steering Committee of the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel have chosen to honor him on this occasion by publishing here a portion of the Consul's remarks.

If the adjective "exceptional" may be used to describe a life, it is particularly appropriate to describe yours. Even a cursory glance at your biography reveals the extraordinary path that you have followed, in the most literal sense of the word. The level on which your concerns have been situated, your unexpected choices (at least some of them), your spiritual itinerary, your options for existence, and your work as philosopher and theologian, all make of you a truly exceptional personality in every sense.

In my eyes, Father, you are first and foremost a Dominican. You attended, first as a student and then as professor, some of the most distinguished institutions of the Order of Preaching Brethren: the famous Saulchoir, the Angelicum in Rome, and the Studium of St. Thomas Aquinas at Toulouse. Keeping with the tradition of your order, you are an orator in sacred eloquence and, if I may say so, one of great talent. Your homilies are among the most brilliant and richest which I have heard in Jerusalem. Also in keeping with the vocation of your order, you have participated

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Jean Gueguinou is the Consul General of the Republic of France in Jerusalem. Translated from the French.

actively in the “life of science,” as mentioned by Pope John Paul II to the members of his general chapter in audience in September 1983. You have participated, by means of your writings and studies, in deepening our understanding of the theological and philosophical works of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, on the one hand, and of the Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, on the other. At the same time, you have also considered the task of the brothers of St. Dominic to be, in the magnificent expression of St. Paul, “the dispensers of the mysteries of God.”

Father: In your religious life as well as in your life in general, I am reminded today particularly of one date: May 20, 1962, the day when you arrived at the St. Isaiah House in Jerusalem, which had been founded in 1960 by Fr. Bruno Hussar. It is sufficient to have read your book, *L'Exil et la Demeure*, subtitled, “a journal of a Christian in Israel,” in order to understand what have been since then your struggles, your disappointments, and your hopes. I cannot do better than to quote the definition you yourself have written:

A Christian whose home is in Jerusalem and who partakes, with the Jewish people returned to its land, in the experience of exile and of waiting. An exile comforted by hope. A waiting animated by the certainty that God acts across the wanderings of a history of which He is the Master and whose length He knows.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, for more than twenty years, your life here has been largely devoted to Jewish studies, to the knowledge of Judaism, to the theology of dialogue between Judaism and the Church – which you consider to be not yet the perfect mistress of its arguments and its expressions – and to the multiple and daily encounters with the most diverse Jewish milieux. Accordingly, you played an active role in the founding in 1966 of the Rainbow Group and in that of the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity, and in 1974 you were named consultant to the Pontifical Commission for Religious Dialogue between the Catholic Church and Judaism.

I wish to emphasize that you approach this dialogue as lucidly as possible, convinced that in order to engage in it one must know the differences and measure the nature of the depths which separate or oppose them. One must, as you have written, “distinguish without driving apart, unite without confusing.” I might add that for you the encounter between Jews and Christians reveals the necessity for a double existence: “rigor to the truth and faithfulness to oneself. Tenderness of benevolence and of compassion in the approach towards the other.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising, my dear Father, that, for reasons which everyone here can imagine, your undertakings in this path which led you to acquire Israeli citizenship were not done without your encountering misunderstandings. These misunderstandings – which it is not for me to judge – you have accepted. Knowing you somewhat, I believe that they have hurt you, especially when they came from those

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1. M.J. Dubois, *L'Exil et la Demeure; Journal de Bord d'un Chrétien en Israël (1962-1983)* (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

at the center of your life, that is to say, from inside the Church. You have assumed them, certainly surrounded by your friends and disciples, but, where you yourself are situated, these misunderstandings cannot but be at the cost of a profound and intimate solitude. The manner in which you have done this, with restrained modesty, is for me the most attractive aspect of your personality; that which is most you, which is attractive but less known, the fact that you are a man of mercy, mercy which you practice almost to rashness.

My dear Father, when I informed you of my intention of proposing your nomination for the Legion of Honor to the Government of France, you gave me a *nihil obstat*, replying that through you would be honored a certain type of Christian presence, French in origin, in Israel. French you are, actually, by birth, by culture, by roots, and also by all that you feel and which you know so well to recount whenever you let your mind wander over the landscape of our country in which, in its diversity and its beauty, one may perceive profoundly our history and our identity, one being inseparable from the other.

Here in Jerusalem, you are a representative of that culture of which we are often accused, albeit unjustly, of being excessively proud; you are so at the Hebrew University, which welcomed you in 1968. A French Dominican as dean of the Department of Philosophy of the Hebrew University is not exactly a banal thing, and is indicative of the high esteem in which you are held by the intellectual elite of Jerusalem, as well as of the unique place which you occupy in this complex and fascinating Jerusalem scene.

It is surely fitting that you receive the knighthood of the Legion of Honor, which I am to bestow in you in a few moments, here in Jerusalem, and nowhere else. I am honored to be your patron in our first national order, but I am equally happy because I hold you in an admiration which I cannot conceal, and because I feel for you a friendship which has developed out of our confidential and warm meetings in various settings in and around the city, such as in the monastery of Abu-Gosh, where we both have part of our hearts.

I would like to conclude with a quotation from one of your writings, which is the most beautiful description of Jerusalem that I know:

It is situated like a promontory on the edge of the desert, on the watershed; Jerusalem is at the frontier between the East and the West, between past and present. Moreover, this frontier crosses it so as to rend it in two. In it one encounters and confronts the sacred and the profane, sanctity and sin. It belongs both to the mundane and the transcendental, to the human and the Divine, to time and to eternity. City of stone and of sky, it is both a city where men live with their passions and the symbol which prefigures the Supernal Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

It is in this city that makes you so vibrant, Father, that I wish you a long and happy life.

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.