

JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF JEWS, JUDAISM AND ISRAEL

by

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You have asked me to make known what I tell my Christian friends, particularly those who come to this country as visitors and pilgrims, when I speak to them about Jews, Judaism and Israel, that is to say, when I speak about you.

Generally I have to make such an exposé in order to reply to questions or objections, which are sometimes aggressive and bitter. The first task consists, in fact, in resolving false problems, in discerning ambiguities, in clarifying misunderstandings, if not in discouraging hostilities. So, for you, the first advantage of such an enterprise, will be to obtain a knowledge of some of the objections and difficulties which are experienced by Christians.

The style of this presentation will be closer to that of a testimony than of a university lecture. I will in fact, try to communicate to you intuitions which inspire my conviction when I speak to Christians about Jews, Judaism, and this country.

While doing this, I am perfectly conscious of the fact that I place myself in a situation of weakness: I am going to speak without armour or, if you prefer, without dialectics or sophistication, but it does not mean without reason, or without reasons! I am ready to elucidate my approach and to justify my arguments. But "the heart has reasons that reason does not know", it is at this level and in this light that I address myself to you, as to the Christians to whom I speak of these things. I am equally conscious of the pretension there is, for a Christian, to speak of the Jews and of Judaism to a Jewish audience. The paradox here is to pretend to explain to somebody who he is. And there is, moreover, in such a purpose, an internal contradiction of which I am equally conscious: this contradiction is two-fold, as I am going to speak from the outside about Jews and Judaism, that is to say of an identity I have no part in, and, what is even more dangerous, I am going to try to express, with the help of considerations

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perforce theoretical and objective, of a reality, the Jewish existence, which belongs to the secret of subjectivity, to the uncommunicable domain of a destiny and an experience of life.

The most important thing to communicate to Christian interlocutors, is that to account for Judaism and for the Jewish existence, is not analysing a system of thought, or a set of values, but introducing to a life experience, or at least to be attentive to it. The secret of Judaism, which escapes the awareness of most Christians, is that it comes more from an existential experience than from a theological system. Thus, in the actual fact of speaking about it, there is a danger of subtle contradiction. Methodical analysis tends to suppress the transcendency of the testimony. I am equally conscious of this contradiction and of its risks.

In order to make this presentation clearer and easier, I will divide it into six paragraphs.

1. ORIGINAL CONFUSIONS AND PARADOXES TO BE OVERCOME.

The first move consists evidently in discovering the confusions which must be dispelled, the paradoxes that must be accepted, if one wants to respect the reality about which one speaks, that is to say the Jewish reality. I invite my Christian interlocutors to become conscious of the fact that the realities signified by the terms 'Israel of the Bible', 'Judaism', 'Jews' and 'State of Israel', are paradoxically, and simultaneously the same thing and not the same thing. Because this original complexity was not recognized, many censors of the Jewish realities maintained, with more or less good faith, a permanent confusion. Speaking of Israel and of the Jews, one moves from one meaning to another without warning. But what must be accepted from the first is that, when it is a question of any Jewish reality, religion and nation, Judaism and Zionism, State of Israel and Jewish people, they are all present together, and nevertheless discernible as elements which must not be confused, because they are different.

In the face of so complex a reality, it is necessary to respect the methodic principle, which is expressed in the title of one of Jacques Maritain's books: "Distinguish in order to Unite". This is the condition for any encounter with reality, and particularly for any good theology. It is a golden rule, indispensable, if one wants to find one's way in so complex and mysterious a domain as Jewish reality.

Christians on the New Left, for instance, tend to forget this rule. They confuse Israel, the Jews and Judaism. Passing from one level of analysis to another they do not take care of the paradox that they are altogether tightly linked, though distinct. At the most apparent and the most superficial level, there is first, Israel's political system, with its mistakes, omissions and faults. Analysed at the level of politics, it is neither better nor worse than that of Giscard d'Estain or of the Ford administration! On the

other hand, one tends to forget that the citizens of Israel are the first to criticize it unsparingly, even according to criterions contradictory to Judaism itself! At another level, already much deeper, there is the link between this people and this land, in the name of Jewish identity, a reality of which political Zionism is an expression, but whose mysterious significance it is far from exhausting. Then there is the most decisive level, that of the theological truth, the question of the actual existence of Judaism, and that of the relations between the people of Israel and the Church, in the perspective of God's unique design. This belongs to a theology which has not yet emerged and without which it is yet impossible to pass a just and clear judgment on the other levels. So it is necessary to recognize that one rarely comes down to this level of analysis. One avoids it or even fears to have recourse to it, preferring to satisfy oneself with clichés which perpetuate confusion.

But clearly, the condition for the elaboration of the theology which alone would permit one to understand things from the inside, is to take for granted the paradoxes inherent in the Jewish reality. And, in truth, to say that the Israel of the Bible, Judaism as a religious tradition, the Jews as a people, and the State of Israel, are simultaneously the same and not the same thing, means to accept a series of paradoxes. The important thing is to try to understand them, or rather to understand the Jewish conscience and outlook on the world which stems from it, on the basis of this principle.

2. THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF JEWISH REALITY.

It seems possible to me to classify the various ways of accounting for the Jewish existence with the help of three fundamental, ever-present, couples: religion-nation, Israel-diaspora, particular-universal. Certainly these three binomials are not of equal importance. They are not situated at the same level. They are not parallel – they interfere and cross each other. Thus, I have announced three couples, or perhaps, as in the Bible, there could be four! Maybe the couple faith-observance should be added, in order to include in the synthesis the variety of religious attitudes. One could as well express the binomial particular-universal in terms of uniqueness and exemplariness – any Jewish experience being at the same time singular and open, as a model for any spiritual experience. Finally, it would be necessary to show more precisely how other opposite couples which appear when examining the Jewish reality, mystical-historical, spiritual-temporal, transcendental-immanent, for example, can be reduced to these three or more fundamental couples. I submit them to your reflection and to your criticism, but may I say that it might be useful and enlightening to have recourse to them in order to account, at the same time, for the unity and the variety of expressions of the Jewish consciousness. It is sufficient to mark the various terms of these binomials with a positive or negative sign, in order to make

manifest the diversity in modes of being and of feeling Jewish, within an identical structure.

It would be easy, in any case, to illustrate its usage with the help of a few typical examples. Thus, there are in Israel many citizens who have come to this country because they are Jewish and who, however, never go to the Synagogue and do not observe the *mitzwot*. On the other hand, there is a quarter of New York, Williamsburg, or the rue des Rosiers, Paris, where Jews go to the Synagogue and observe the *mitzwot*, but have no intention of coming to Israel. Some of them are even anti-Zionists, for religious reasons. There are in Jerusalem, in Mea She'arim, religious Jews who have chosen to live there because of a religious conviction, but who are not Israeli citizens, and are sometimes fiercely anti-Zionist. Finally, between these extremes, there is the case, also complex and frequent, of personages like Georges Friedmann, the sociologist, or Raymond Aron, the philosopher; they do not go to the Synagogue, they have no intention whatever of coming to Israel, save to become doctors "honoris causa" of the Hebrew University, and still they have, nonetheless, a mysterious and indefinable appurtenance to the Jewish people. One could multiply examples. Those we have mentioned are sufficient to show that, whatever the variety in the modes of being Jewish, or to define oneself as a Jew, each of these cases finds its place in the frame of the elementary structure we have made clear.

3. RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF ISRAEL.

Of these three or four couples, it is clear that the most fundamental, the closest to the essence of Judaism itself, is the binomial religion-nation. It is the one which is the least understood by Christians. Religion and nation meet not as a synthesis or the composition of two elements, but as two poles of a unique reality, two poles which call for each other, and integrate mutually in an organized unity altogether original. People with a religious vocation, religion with a national basis: to understand Jewish identity, whatever, one must hold together the two dimensions.

Thus, when Golda Meir or Isaac Rabin, in the Israeli Parliament, Ambassador Haim Hertzog, at the United Nations' tribune, quote the Bible in their political speeches, they do not, for all that, preach a sermon. They are referring to the Bible as to their historical or cultural treasure, in the manner of President Giscard d'Estain quoting Chateaubriand or Rousseau, and Prime Minister Harold Wilson quoting Shakespeare or T. S. Eliot. On the other hand, when in the Synagogue the Jews, for example in the eighteen blessings, proclaim the bond between the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, they are not going into politics, they are praying, in an act of Thanksgiving or intercession of a people addressing itself to its God.

First, throughout the whole Bible, since Abraham and Moses, Israel is conscious of being the people of the Promise and of the Covenant, a messianic nation, a social reality which finds its principle of unity in the same religious vocation: to be faithful to the Law given by God, to wait for and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. One can say that David, king of Israel, in the same attitude of faith was adoring the Lord as the God of Israel, and was leading his people as the people of God. A religious nation, a national religion. Such was Israel's role and purpose before God and among the nations.

Since the destruction of the second Temple, this unity has been broken. The Jewish people has lost its homeland and its life-centre. History shows how, since the dispersion, that is to say two millenaries, Israel oscillates between the two poles of its spiritual reality: religion and nation. Exiled, far from its fatherland, it is in its religious tradition that Israel has found the principle of its permanence and cohesion. It is through its faithfulness to its religious dimensions that Israel has maintained its integrity as a nation.

This insistence on the religious pole was even more emphasized during the period of assimilation which followed the Anklarung and the French Revolution. After the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the Great Sanhedrin of Napoleon and the revolutions of 1848, the ideal of any cultured and emancipated Jew was to be integrated into the nation on the territory of which he intended to enjoy the rights of a full citizen. As for his being Jewish, that was conditioned by his fidelity to the religious dimension of Judaism. It was then that in Europe the Prussian citizen of the Mosaic Confession, and the French citizen of the Israelite religion came into being.

In fact, the assimilation so achieved, [at the expense of the national element of Judaism did not stop antisemitism. One could say: to the contrary. That was what Theodor Herzl felt when, as a correspondent in Paris for a Viennese paper, he was witness to the Dreyfus affair. We have learned since then to what excesses a pseudo-scientific antisemitism can lead in the countries where Jews seemed to be well assimilated. It was thus that Theodor Herzl began to dream of the creation of a Jewish State, in order to bring together, in a land of their own, these incessantly persecuted Jews.

This brings us to the contemporary stage of this long history, that which begins with Zionism and continues with the existence of the State of Israel. Zion was, from the start, a movement for national and political liberation. More than that, the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, was in such a hurry to gather the Jewish people to a land of their own – though he was so little set on the Land of the Bible – that he was ready to accept any territory in order to realize his purpose. When one learns that he was on the point of accepting Uganda, one remains aghast at the sense of humour in history. In fact, it is the traditional hope of the East European

communities and the secular nostalgia of the Lovers of Zion which furnished Zionism with the dynamism it lacked. As a powerful and deep ocean swell, they turned the current back towards Jerusalem, towards *Ha-Aretz*, the land of their ancestors.

So, once more, we find ourselves confronted with a complex synthesis, or rather a paradoxical unity, in which two elements meet: a national expectancy and a religious hope. The whole paradox – one should say the whole mystery – is precisely the presence of the one in the other. Earthly expectancy here appears as the realization of the hope founded in God. The bond between people and land, in the name of the Book and of tradition, is much deeper and more mysterious than mere political Zionism.

It is this same ambivalence, paradoxically rooted in one same mysterious identity, which can be observed in the daily existence of the Jewish people in Israel. Let us suppose that we question, at the same time, a young “bakhur Yeshiva” (student of the Talmud) of Mea She’arim, the religious quarter of Jerusalem, with his kaftan and his “peoth”, and a young militant of a Ha-Shomer ha-Tzair kibbutz (socialist young guard). If we were to ask the one or the other: “Who are you? Why are you here? What are you hoping for? What future are you expecting for Israel?” I am sure that at that level of language, their answers would be given in terms almost identical, and with equal conviction. “I am Jewish, because I believe in my people’s vocation, because I have read the Bible, because I am waiting for the realization of the promises our forefathers have read about.” Twelve years ago I commented: “Both the one and the other are inspired by a Jewish hope, rooted in a certain consciousness of Israel, and yet one sees how alien to each other are these hopes. The same words on the lips of both these sons of Israel – ‘people’, ‘Messiah’, ‘vocation’, ‘tradition’, ‘hope’, – have radically differing significance – differing to the point of fission. The deepest paradox of Israel lies precisely in the divergence between these two hopes and the difficulty of bringing them together”. Today, after two wars and so many crises, overcome together, and in spite of all the differences and even the passionate oppositions that one can observe at the level of superficial reactions, I would insist on the secret and mysterious identity of these answers, on the consciousness which they display of a common root and, or a common destiny, national and religious at one and the same time.

Christians who are aware of the tension between the religious and the non-religious section of the population, perceive this distinction instinctively in Christian terms. There exists, in fact, between Jews and Christians a misunderstanding about the word religion. The rift in Israel is not one between belief and unbelief, but rather between observance and non-observance. This distinction is important since Judaism is less an orthodoxy than an orthopraxis: what is important indeed is to believe in the One God,

but it is not so much a question of elaborating a theology than to practice a more or less great number of commandments. It would be a mistake to interpret the growing irritation of the "non-religious" with regards to the political play of the religious parties, or the rabbinate, as a sign of loss of faith. One could, rather, say exactly the opposite: the options in Israel today are an "observance without faith" or a "faith without observance". Of course it is a caricature, but there is a grain of truth in it. It happens, in fact, that we meet observance without faith. Thus, one of my colleagues at the University declares himself a pantheist. This is not, evidently, the faith of Israel! and yet, for nothing in the world, would he light a cigarette on the Sabbath! It is for him a question of fidelity, of appurtenance to a people and to a tradition. On the other hand, it happens very often that after a particular lecture on the god of Plato, the Prime Mover of Aristotle, the argument of St. Anselm or the Augustinian illumination, some students come to see me and say to me: "I am not religious, but ...". Evidently, they consider themselves non-religious, because they do not practice the Law, they drive a car on the Sabbath, they carelessly mix meat and milk, but the depth of their questions shows that their soul is open to God, that they are in search of an absolute, which is certainly the first condition of faith. Rather than speaking of the religious dimension of the Jewish identity, I believe that it is more correct to speak of the Presence of God to the Jewish existence.

4. THE PRESENCE OF GOD TO THE JEWISH EXISTENCE.

Two years ago, in a series of lectures on "the Jewish religious experience" sponsored by the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, Prof. Moshe Greenberg, spoke to a group of Christian theologians about "the experience of the Sabbath". He was able to convey to his audience the sacred value of the rhythm of time, the presence of God to the Jewish family, to the Jewish soul, during the whole day of the Sabbath. Prof. Greenberg told us in particular how, being in Venice on a Friday night, with his wife and children, the whole family had unconsciously created for itself, in the heart of the crowd of Gentiles, some sort of sacred space. During all this exposé, as it had been all through the Sabbath of which he had told us, it was manifest that God was present. And the name of God had not even been uttered.

This lecture was for Christians an occasion for discovering the particular mode of the presence of God to the Jewish action, commitment and subjectivity. God present not as an object, but as the Creator from whom everything comes and towards whom ascends all praise and thanksgiving.

What we have just said about the mysterious Presence of the God of Israel to His people is not only true of the religious experience in itself. I believe that there is a religious dimension, more or less conscious, very often hidden, in Jewishness itself.

Our experience at St. Isaiah House has given us the conviction that the Jewish soul is made for God. It is difficult for a Jew to be atheistic. Now I immediately hear the objection: "But we know of many Jewish atheists, who declare themselves openly as such! and look at the three great masters of contemporary thought: in science, Einstein; in psychology, Freud; in sociology, Marx. Did they not develop their vision of the world, if not against God, at least apart from God? Have not Freud and Marx been called, with reason, "masters of suspicion" towards any certitude and in particular towards God? I would then answer: If there are Jews who are atheists, there is a typically Jewish way of being atheistic. The intransigence and the vehemence with which the Jewish unbeliever tries to deny the existence of God are still signs of the absolute for which his soul is made.

Such a paradox calls for a pause. In order to explain it, it is necessary to go back to the very mystery of the election of Israel and to its resonance in Jewish consciousness. When God calls a person to a role or a mission, He gives him the psychology corresponding to this calling. He does not only propose a message, He prepares the heart of whom He chooses in order to make him able to listen, to understand and to answer. Such is the history of all vocations, be it the vocation to a great destiny or to the bond of marriage. A Christian can discover the perfect model of this law in the Gospel of the Annunciation, and each one of us could find its confirmation in the history of his own destiny. So, I could say, without evil intention or ill-humour, that if the Lord called me to be a Dominican monk, it is clear that He did not give me the psychology of a Jesuit!

If this is true for all election, this might also have consequences in the case of the elected people. Since God chose it, and set it apart for himself, in order to be the intermediary of praise and thanksgiving for the universe, to be His witness in the midst of nations, its subjectivity must inevitably carry the mark of this vocation for the absolute. The Jewish soul is by vocation so made for God, so oriented towards adoration, that it is in some way fashioned and built for the absolute. It is a gift at the same time magnificent and terrible, because the soul which bears this mark is condemned to idolatry as soon as it ceases to face the only God, as soon as it bears towards other objects a fervour and a genius which were intended for God only. It is the story of the Golden Calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. The Jewish subjectivity is built in such a way that it tends to transform into an idol any terrestrial object, because it approaches it with the quest for the absolute which can only be applied to the living God.

Then there is the Jewish manner of being atheistic. The zeal itself, vehement and desperate, that the Jews bring into the negation of God still bears the mark of the adoration for which they are called, and for which they are made. The Jewish anxiety, the Jewish despair, the Jewish negation

of oneself are never anything but illustrations of this same paradox: they are the signs of a Jewish subjectivity, become out of hand, so to speak.

We here come to what seems to me to be the deepest reason for antisemitism, at the level of the Jewish identity. When the Jews apply to other objects than God the psychology, it is not surprising that they bring to the things of the world a genius and a particular intellectual capacity. It is doubtless the cause of their success in so many domains, where they exercise the resources of their spirit: philosophy, literature, sciences, medicine, finance, journalism and communication: This earthly success is at the same time admirable and ambiguous: it was precisely this that earned for the Jews the envy and the hostility of the '*goyim*'. What is important to discover is that this success itself condemns the Jewish people to an estrangement and a solitude which are finally just the reverse of election.

So, the faithful and the unfaithful, by reason of the vocation of their people, appear in this world as trouble-makers. Trouble-makers, if they act their role as God's witnesses, for the world does not love prophets and rejects the presence that judges it; trouble-makers, if they are unfaithful, because their success transforms them into unbearable competitors.

5. THE ELECTION AND THE SOLITUDE OF ISRAEL.

Let us now reflect on the nature of election, on its consequences for the Jewish soul and destiny, and also on what I called, the reverse of election, that is to say the paradoxical solitude into which Israel is led by the election. A Christian should admire and rejoice about the singularity which is the consequence of election. Far from being a vocation shut up in itself, it is a model for all spiritual adventure. It is an exemplary destiny opened to universality. Let us consider first the positive aspect of things; the privileged – should one say: aristocratic? – solitude into which the election introduces Israel. In order to understand its wealth, it is sufficient to recall three initial facts which condition the essence itself of Judaism.

There is, in the first place, the fact that the Bible, in spite of its universal destination, is at the outset, the history of a particular people and that it addresses itself first to this people. The Jews listen to it, receive it, transmit it as the Word of God to Israel. This gives to the Jewish reading of the Bible a realism and an urgency, where the consciousness of election manifests itself in action: ethnocentrism and theocentrism at the same time. It was striking, for example, during the tragic days of the Yom Kippur War, the way in which our Jewish friends read Isaiah or Ezekiel, inspired by some kind of anxious interrogation: "What does the Book say about the destiny of our people, about Jerusalem? Not the Jerusalem from above, but the Jerusalem of this earth, in which we live, Zion, where the people is gathered.

The second fact that impressed me is that the original affirmation of the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages is not "God is" or "God is the cause", but "God gave the Torah to this people on Mount Sinai": a certitude obtained at the same time by faith and by the consciousness of belonging to a people that knows that God spoke. This word, this message consists less of the teaching of a doctrine, than of the proposition of a way of life, which sets a people apart. God speaks: "*Shema Israel*", Hear Israel; He calls, He proposes to his people an answer which assumes the form of a way of life and the details of this life are determined by the "*mitzvoth*", the observance of the commandments. The Torah unifies the people, that is based upon the same calling and of the same answer. It sets it apart from the other nations, because it introduces the solitude of a particular way of life.

Thirdly, the manner in which the Jews have kept the treasure of their tradition, has also been a factor setting them apart. Gripped by this "estrangement", we Gentiles have shut them up in the Ghetto, but they, in order to fiercely guard their identity, had already followed the counsel of the Fathers and "built a fence around the Torah".

These three traits would be sufficient to show that it is a question, above all, of a positive solitude. A solitude which, on God's side, results from the choice itself, and which is maintained and kept, on the side of the people, in the consciousness of chosenness. To retain Jewish identity is at the same time, to keep to the true God, to keep to the tradition, to keep to the cohesion of the people chosen by God.

Seen from the outside, this consciousness of being chosen can appear as a shutting oneself up and as an intolerance. Indeed, it is this fierce guard which, while preserving the Jewish identity, has upheld in this world the absolute faith in the One God. We inherited the benefit of this intolerance which the Jews exhibited towards paganism that was demonstrated throughout the centuries.

Paul Claudel perceived admirably both aspects of this intransigent solitude: on the one hand, the refusal of the world, in the name of the ineluctable preference for Jerusalem: "since the world organizes itself for a certain refusal of God, it is he (Israel) who shall be the refusal of the refusal". On the other hand, the fact that in this world all solitude on behalf of God condemns man to an inevitable isolation: "it is not surprising that we disturb society and that, after some time, society does not resist the desire to throw us out: we do not belong".

A Christian cannot but respect this singular solitude. How can we not feel invited to attention, as before the trace of a destiny? It is strange that this Jewish singularity has been so badly understood, and it has been so often the occasion of hostility and scorn. Maybe it is because one has

not perceived that the election introduces the Jewish people to a destiny which – unique and singular as it is – is at the same time universal and exemplary.

This is true of the reading of the Bible. I will not here go into the immense and difficult question of the dangers of typology, nor into the relationship between the Old Testament and the New according to the Church Fathers.¹ What I will simply underline is that the Bible, as a history of a particular people and as the Word addressed to this people, is at the same time a history opened to every man of goodwill and especially to every man who shares the faith of Abraham. Sometimes the Bible has been compared to a psycho-analyst's report, the psycho-analysis which God has made for his people, in which Israel's passions and reactions are indefatigably unveiled and cured, enlightened and purified. But every human adventure, every situation of humanity can find again and again in this story the traits of its own destiny.²

Singularity in view of exemplariness. This, being true of the Jewish history, as a whole, because in the case of the Holocaust of an altogether particular application. The horrible and tragic character of this event is also absolutely unique; but considered in the light of a history marked by election, it becomes rich with exemplary significance and of universal application.³

The sufferings of Israel, like its destiny, has an exemplary value for all human sufferings. It is in fact, for the Jewish people, a consequence of the mystery of the election. This invites the Jewish soul to see in every distress and every misfortune of this world a meaning in the light of its own experience.

Jewish tradition has recognized in Israel's grievous destiny – both singular and mysterious – a value for the salvation of the world. In the darkness of its history Israel has recognized its own image in the features of the mysterious figure of the suffering servant of the Lord described in Isaiah. Faced with the exemplariness of the Holocaust with regard to all human suffering and to the mystery of death, and of the exemplary redeeming value of the suffering of Israel, the Christian feels himself invited to meditation and silence. How could he not feel himself questioned by a mystery so similar and so near to that which is at the heart of his faith?

This paradox of singularity and universality which is given with election, comes to very topical and contemporary expression in the return of the Jews to Zion. The significance of Jerusalem can be summarized in three characteristics particular to it: Its centrality, its sacramentality and its universality.

¹ cf. M. J. Dubois, *The Catholic Church, the Jews and Israel today*, in *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, No. 2, 1976.

² cf. Read the Israel in Israel, in *Vigiles a Jerusalem*, pp. 12-21.

³ cf. A Christian look on the Holocaust, in *Vigiles a Jerusalem*, pp. 73-108.

Centrality, because Jerusalem is at the centre of Jewish prayer, Jewish observance, Jewish existence, just as it was the object of Jewish nostalgia for centuries.

Sacramentality, because for a Jew, Jerusalem is at the same time a mystery, and a reality. This city – *Yerushalayim shel zahav* – the golden Jerusalem, is not only the symbol of a celestial city, Jerusalem in heaven, but an earthly city of men – the city of which Teddy Kollek is the mayor! It is simultaneously the political capital of this nation and the site of the Temple over which the Shekinah remains present, a city where the sacred and the profane, the human and the divine, and where time and eternity are mixed and interwoven.

Universality, because the vocation of this city is that of being at the same time singular – it is a Jewish city – and yet open for the whole world, a sanctuary given to the Jews, but to which all nations are invited to come.

In God's educational process with regard to his people, the return to Zion appears as a preliminary phase and the symbol of a much greater reality than the reconquest of a capital: it is a sacrament of the conversion of the heart, a vocation to peace and to a universal openness of which Jerusalem is the centre.

To Israeli friends who question me about recent events, I reply something like this: "Your return to Jerusalem is of significance only if you understand and accept all its challenges. To come back to Jerusalem is not only, for the Jewish people, a matter of regaining the political capital of a nation which has finally won its territory and independence. To come back to Jerusalem, means for the Jewish soul, to assume the spiritual responsibility of a vocation which concerns the whole universe, its unity, its harmony and its peace. What does this universal vocation imply? Which promises and demands? You know that I have, as a Christian, my answers to these questions. But you, as children of Israel, in the sincerity of your Jewish consciousness, must recognize yours. Return to Zion – return to God. For a Jewish soul, these two movements cannot be dissociated. As a Christian, I invite you to recognize the challenge of this. It is an awesome responsibility and a mysterious destiny, but what is asked of you is to take it up in order to be true to yourselves. This is the price, and only if it is paid your will-to-live as a Jewish people finds its justification and its meaning."⁴

Israel received the gift of Jerusalem, which involves an immense responsibility before God and before the world. This requires from Israel a twofold step, and, at the limit, a twofold generosity or abandonment. Firstly, back in its city, the Jewish people is called to say to all the world: "I have

⁴ cf. Jerusalem, sign of contradiction or pole of unity, in *Vigiles a Jerusalem*, pp 170 - 171.

received and I guard Jerusalem, but I know that this city does not belong to me alone. I am conscious that I am only the depository. I have received Jerusalem and I am ready to give it to the world and to share it with all people of goodwill."

Israel certainly does that. The mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, would say with reason; "But such is precisely the situation. Never has Jerusalem been so well-kept, nor so wide open. Look at the crowds which come to it and mix themselves in it, coming from all the horizons of the world. Never has Jerusalem realized so well its vocation to universality."

But the Jewish people is invited, in the line of its vocation, to go even farther. Israel is requested to recognize the gratuitousness of the gift, at the very moment lifting it up and showing it to the world, and to say: "I have received it and I share the gift which was made to me", invalidating, so to speak, from the inside, the first person of the singular. Then it would receive, guard, open and share the gift of God at the same time as a Prince and as a pauper, as a Prince because as a pauper, as a prodigal and generous benefactor because everything has been given to him. In this way the People of the Bible would also in its present condition remain a model to all beneficiaries of God's gifts.

Such is without any doubt the ultimate significance of the return to Zion, and the demand that it implies. It is the programme model of all sanctity. And it would be for us very much out of place to reproach Israel for not having realized it yet. Our task as Christians is, through love and prayer, to help Israel play this grand and difficult role in gratitude and humility.

6. CHANGE OF OUTLOOK.

To tell the truth, the discoveries that I have just told you about are rather recent. They are the fruit of the reflection of a Christian conscience which was suddenly awakened, which felt itself questioned and called to attention, and the Church has encouraged this soul-searching. It is certain that the ignorance of these aspects, the unconsciousness about them, the lack of respect for their mysterious complexity have been, all along the centuries, the cause of tragic misunderstanding.

Christians feel themselves often ill at ease when they try to understand the particular form of Israeli nationalism, as they seem not yet able to find a place in their faith for the – certainly complex – elements which are fundamental for the Jewish consciousness. The most important of these elements are certainly the election and the bond of the people with its land. What today is the mark of the election in the destiny of the Jewish people? What is the meaning of this people, and of its election, in the new economy of salvation established by Jesus? What remains of the ancient promises now that Christ has come? If the bond of the Jewish people with the land which was promised to them is justified by the Bible and Jewish tradition, what value and meaning does this have for Christian theology? It is clear that our theology has not yet elaborated a complete and satisfying an-

swer to these questions, but it seems that, for the last twenty years, the Christian reflection has opened itself to a new look at the Jews, Judaism and Israel, both at the top and at the base of Christian hierarchy and communities.

Indeed, one observes today in Christian circles a greater openness to recognizing the permanence of God's design and to reading the present events of the Jewish people in the perspective of the history of salvation. They are more respectful of the continuity of God's mysterious pedagogy towards this people which remains marked by its original election, starting with Abraham.

In this connection I should like to point to a worrying paradox from which we now begin to free ourselves. As is shown in the second Vatican Council's declaration "Nostra Aetate", the Catholic Church is more and more ready to recognize "seeds of truth" in every doctrine, every expression of faith, every Credo, whether it concerns animism, fetishism, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Shintoism, Islam, even Marxism, hippies, atheism, with only one exception: Judaism. It is urgent to ask oneself: Why? The reason is, in fact, very simple. The historical and cultural expression of Jewish religious identity implied the refusal and negation of Jesus Christ. This explains why Christians – instead of considering, as they do for all the others, the positive aspects and "seeds of truth" in Jewish religious attitudes – too often limited their outlook to that negative aspect, which, in fact, divides radically the Synagogue and the Church, namely, the rejection of Jesus Christ. This is the more painful because Jews and Christians should understand each other (at least, the Christians should understand the Jews) in the continuity of a common revelation, a common history and a common divine design. Here we have, in truth, a quarrel over the heritage, a family quarrel, and every one knows that such quarrels are the most painful and bitter.

It seems that nowadays we witness a decisive progress in all places where Jews and Christians pursue dialogue: We seem to have reached a level of frankness and of confidence which enables us to speak with each other, without animosity and without hatred, but also without illusion and fear, in a mutual loyalty: we agree to disagree. Certainly, we discover more and more clearly that Jesus Christ divides us, that He is between us, Jews and Christians, as a stumbling-block. Such a statement remains, for a Christian, infinitely painful, but what is new is that we are now able to speak about it and after having said it, to discover the lines of continuity. Certainly Jesus Christ divides us, but this same Jesus, born of the Jewish people, is also the one who unites us: we are embarked upon the same course, beginning with Abraham and Moses, to find its fulfilment in the kingdom of God.

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