

**SOME CONTEMPORARY ISRAELI VIEWS ON GENTILES
AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**

by *PENINA PELI**

Those who recognize the phrase "Jews and Gentiles" as a familiar term of reference are aware of the fact that the implications of this relationship have varied, sometimes dramatically, throughout the centuries.

Before the Christian Era, Israel was a people apart, a nation that had accepted the sovereignty of a spiritual God in a pagan world. Through their example and testimony, all the other peoples on earth were to worship one day, the One God of all of mankind, a recurrent theme in biblical prophecy. After the downfall of the Jewish commonwealth which had existed for over a thousand years, heralded by the Roman destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), their role in what some call "divine history" seemed radically altered. Their own inferior condition and the ascendancy of Christianity, a universal religion based on the Bible, served to relegate Israel to the background. Although the very success of the "new" religion pointed to an atmosphere of acceptance of the main tenets of Judaism and reverence for the God of Israel, deep antagonism became the dominant feature of their relationship. The Christian Church wished to supplant rather than supplement Israel's testimony and was ready to go to any lengths to substantiate their convictions. The Jews, in turn, withdrew to less conspicuous areas of influence, making every effort to strengthen themselves inwardly, while vehemently refuting the Christian claim to sole legitimacy.

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The explosion into prominence of yet another religion basing itself on biblical monotheism placed the Jews in an even more obscure position. Islam has also demonstrated considerable enmity to the people of Israel, and sees itself as the rightful heir to its legacy. The Jews on their side have shown no inclination of relinquishing their claim to their own ancient tradition. Few, however, including the people of Israel, with the possible exception of some erratic romantics and fervent mystics, expected the Jews to ever again play a role of any consequence in world history.

In our time, Israel's designation as "the Chosen People" has nevertheless resumed a ring of expectancy, chiefly as a result of the cataclysmic events of the last century. The planning and the execution of a scheme aimed at the extinction of the Jews in the Holocaust, when millions of others also suffered and died, is nonetheless unique in the annals of evil for evil's sake. A nation engaged in a world — wide war of conquest, devoted a disproportionate amount of all of its energies to meticulously carrying out — to the last detail, the extermination of every male and female, from the very young to the senile, who had any trace of Jewish blood four generations back.

Much has been said of Christian involvement and responsibility for this great human tragedy through the Church's centuries long teaching, that the Jews were rejected by God. Israel's rebirth, accompanied by massive convulsions has put it in the spotlight of the world arena, it being regarded with greatly conflicting emotions by most other nations. The shift in Jewish identity that statehood has brought about is not only a challenge to other peoples and faiths; it also calls for Jews to reevaluate some classic attitudes, and reexamine the way they themselves see their own destiny.

It is in the spirit of potential renewal that some spiritual leaders in Israel have been asked to discuss their ideas on Jewish participation in interfaith meetings and dialogue. Related issues are conversion to Judaism as a renewed possibility and Jewish views on the status of other faiths. "No religion is an island," said Abraham Joshua Heschel in an address given at a Christian theological seminary. "Is it not our duty to help one another in unlocking doors to holiness in time, in opening minds to the challenge of the Hebrew Bible, in seeking to respond to the voice of the prophets?" Some questions have been partially answered here, bringing in their wake countless others.

NECESSITY — NOT IDEAL

"Israel's sojourn among the nations has always borne an overtone of suffering and tragedy ever since Jacob dwelt in a strange land with his father-

in-law Laban in the land of Haran.” With these words, Prof. Ze’ev Falk who teaches law at the Hebrew University, and is a recognized authority in the field of Jewish family law opened our discourse. An Orthodox Jew aware of the new vistas that have been opened in recent years since Israel’s return to statehood, Prof. Falk is an active participant in interfaith meetings here and abroad. “Our relationship with other peoples,” he pointed out, “has to a large measure depended on the way we were treated by them. Under favourable conditions, valuable interchange took place and as a result there was mutual development. And it is interesting to note, how often societies prospered or deteriorated in proportion to their attitude to the Jewish people. We seem to have served as a sort of barometer of the general human predicament, reflecting its ups and downs, its ills and triumphs.”

The Torah of Israel is founded on universalistic principles. This is a feature of our heritage which is almost forgotten due to historical and environmental conditioning according to Prof. Falk, since the Torah was originally meant for everyone. A midrashic commentary has it that when God hewed out the Ten Commandments in stone for Moses to deliver to the children of Israel, the fragments that fell away, as He chiseled, were distributed among all of the seventy nations of the world. The symbolic figure of seventy appears frequently in biblical literature as in the Temple sacrifice dedicated for all the nations on Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles). Interestingly, he says, “the highest court of Jewish law, the Sanhedrin was composed of exactly seventy judges, a quorum which was supposed to represent a complete spectrum of divergent views. This is also an indication of the diversity of characteristics found among people and of the the variety of views possible within the godly scheme of things.”

Prof. Falk’s orientation to law—a subject so fraught with friction and conflict is steeped in tradition. This tradition based on divine law is usually considered inflexible. “Actually,” he says, “nothing could be further from the truth. The halakhic mode is obvious a system built on opposing views expressed among our sages, even its most basic principles. The application of the laws promulgated by the Torah has been subject to astonishing changes, when we come to think of it,” he stated. There is no doubt that Prof. Falk is speaking as a strictly observant Jew, walking in the most traditional paths of the development of Jewish *halakha*. Therefore, the significance of his remarks are well worth serious consideration by Jews as well as non-Jews.

“Unfortunately,” he explained, “*circumstance bred necessity which in turn became fixed as ideal.*” This is the crux of the problem as he sees it, not discounting its relevance to Christians as well as to Jews. “On our side,”

he says ruefully, "it may be said to our credit that we have spilled more ink than blood. But even this does not sufficiently justify present stubbornness on the part of many Jews to open the doors of our heritage wide and make it available to the Gentile world. Our ability to do this, he feels, will be decisive in many ways. The monotheistic society established by the people of Israel depended on spiritual inspiration as a guide and model for all other nations, which were expected to set up their own moral order. It is up to us to exploit every avenue of understanding in order to reach the state of universal harmony which should be pursued by those who emulate God's ways of justice, first introduced in the Hebrew scriptures. Compassion, gratitude, and respect should be offered to the Jews whose loyalty to biblical teachings often cost them their lives.

It is a mistake, however, says Prof. Falk to see the Jewish people as superior or privileged above others. The fact that certain prerogatives were conferred on them, in line with their special obligations, in no way detracts from the worth of any other human being before God. To support his contention, he quoted many sources, high among whom was Rabbi Akiva, perhaps Judaism's most revered figure besides Moses himself. "Man is beloved for he is created in the image of God," said Rabbi Akiva; there are commentaries which single out the word "man" in his statement in order to point out that the reference is to *all* men, and not only to the Jews who are tied to a special covenant with God.

Prof. Falk went on to quote a medieval authority known as "Hameiri" who said that while pagan peoples were spurned and to be avoided by the people of Israel, that principle is no longer applied in his time, the thirteenth century, to the Gentile world. Implicit in his statement is that Jews are not allowed to employ different moral standards towards non-Jews. And in modern times, Samson Raphael Hirsch, a nineteenth century German rabbi postulated the priority of decent human relations over the value of Torah itself. It is possible to claim that subsequent events perpetrated chiefly by the people of Germany proved Hirsch's thesis as tragically wrong. But only a minority of Jews saw this a further justification of withdrawal from hostile environments which they had come to think of as self-imposed, and inherent to Judaism itself.

The deep faith and natural optimism of the Jews who love both life and their Creator, always seeing both as linked, make them as ready as ever to deal with almost everyone. It behooves us more than ever to enable others to become more intimately acquainted with Judaism. "We should also devote much more of our efforts to aiding converts to Judaism by eliminating unnecessary obstacles placed in the way of those who reach

out, and seek real acceptance among us. "We simply have no right to isolate ourselves," he said with firm determination." There is a midrashic account of the origins of Amalek, the sworn enemy of the Jews since their exodus from Egypt. Their evil menace to the people of Israel has been said to appear in different faces throughout time. Our rabbis tell us that Amalek came into being as a result of the refusal of Leah (Rachel's sister) to marry Esau, Jacob's twin brother: a strange hypothesis for a people who often saw their inaccessibility as a virtue. "The Torah was given in the wilderness," said Prof. Falk, "so that none could claim exclusive right to it. God loves all of His children equally. There is an abundance of evidence to demonstrate this in the Hebrew Bible, the prophets of Israel, talmudic sources, midrashic accounts, and in the law as developed by our rabbis over the centuries. The Kabbalah of sixteenth century Safed describes the steps towards full redemption as being the responsibility of all mankind."

Prof. Falk stresses the need to examine and check the administration of the laws, so that we may fulfill the biblical injunction "that you may *live* by them." *Halakha*, the laws regulating Jewish life were never meant to be misused in support of perpetuating harmful dogma. They may not make life easier at times, but they affect the quality of our way of life. We can check ourselves by turning to our sources to get at the heart of the *Halakha's* intent — to which end aggadic (or midrashic) commentaries are extremely valuable.

In any case, he concludes, the pious or righteous man is loved by God, regardless of nation or race. The Torah gave Israel a special function to perform, and they have played a thankless role in human history. Another midrashic story is pertinent here. The nations of the world were each given the opportunity to receive the Ten Commandments, and each refused because of its inability to abide by one or another of its impositions. When the children of Israel also hesitated, God held Mount Sinai over their heads threateningly, so that seeing the choice offered to them they gave their famous answer, "we shall do (what is written) and obey (what You tell us)." There is certainly no mellow romanticism in Prof. Falk's realistic Jewish attitude. "This realism combined with faith will win us the day," Prof. Falk said smiling.

OPPRESSORS AND PARTNERS

Rabbi Leon Ashkenazi, formerly of North Africa and France, presently head of the Maayanot Judaic Study Center in Jerusalem, has addressed interreligious conferences on many occasions throughout the years. These primarily consist of confrontations between Christians and Jews, as the Islamic world is still largely closed to encounters of this kind. His initial

reaction to holding interfaith dialogue was expressed in unconcealed disappointment because, he explained such forums are usually used by Christians to strengthen their own position. "Instead of an exchange of views in relation to the biblical vision, they continually seek ways to further demonstrate the pre-eminence of their own revelation while refusing to acknowledge the relevance of Judaism."

Rabbi Ashkenazi, better known as "Manitu" due to his outstanding role as a leader of the Jewish scout movement in France ("Manitu" is a common appellation of an Indian chieftain) is descended from a distinguished line of rabbis in Tunisia. His scholarship includes a profound knowledge of the Jewish heritage, and he is well versed in general philosophy which he studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. He directed their Institute of Jewish Studies before moving to Israel after the Six-Day War. He still lectures at the Institute, traveling regularly to France from Jerusalem. He is one of the recognized masters of Jewish mysticism, and his entire mode of thought is permeated with its ideas, especially regarding Israel's road to redemption.

"Redemption", states Manitu, "is seen as a universalistic happening by the prophets and sages of Israel. All of mankind is God's concern; the Jews anticipate the time when all the peoples living on earth will hear God's word so that He may ultimately be declared the "One". This is expressed plainly in the most important of our daily prayers, the *Aleinu*. The nations, particularly the faithful followers of Christianity and Islam which inherently bear the greatest affinity to Judaism, must come to recognize the primary authenticity of God's word as lived, and witnessed by the people of Israel."

What possible developments does he envision? "As long as the Christian world continues to propagate the idea that they are the rightful heirs of the covenant first made between God and the children of Israel, they will not be able to view Jewish existence as having theological significance. And it has become impossible to evade facing the living Israel as a reality to be reckoned with. They must at the very least accept the spiritual truth of Judaism as it is understood by the Jewish people, if they are not ready to go beyond that. History records centuries of persecution of the Jews at the hands of Christian oppressors yet they are still potentially our major partner in the fulfillment of the biblical purpose," says Manitu.

He is pointedly critical of the attitudes of certain elements within Judaism. Under the conditions of "Exile", pious Jews struggled tirelessly to keep the various commandments of the Torah as well as they could and more so, while cherishing the hope of rebirth of the "Community of Israel" (*Knesset Yisrael*). Our return as a people to our own land always domin-

ated our thinking, our prayers, and our hopes. Holiness in daily life was only partial expression of Israel's identity as a people dedicated to living with God on every level. Our reemergence as a nation calls for a radical reevaluation of our view regarding our own existence and destiny, and how our relationship to other peoples is effected. There is no longer any justification for defining our Jewish identity in narrow terms. The universal meaning of Israel's message to mankind is most relevant at this time. More openness to voluntary conversion to Judaism is also necessary, Manitu feels. As far as we are concerned, a righteous Gentile need only adhere to the "Seven Noachide Laws." However, the prerogative to chose should be their own, and we should on our part make Judaism available to those who seek to study it and possibly become part of the people of Israel.

Returning to the subject of dialogue, Manitu said: "Many people are not aware of the fact that the Christian approach is actually much more exclusive than our's. We cannot continue to respond to their invitations to dialogue until they demonstrate their intentions to deal more courageously with the obstacles to creative discussion with us. Let them go beyond seeing Israel as playing a mysterious role in divine history; let them try to come to terms with Judaism in other ways besides through the crucified son; let them not exploit the rich heritage of Judaism to enhance themselves while obstinately refusing to acknowledge its inherent validity for the living people of Israel.

Failure to reconsider their position, Manitu fears, will compel them to see Israel reborn as an outright contradiction to traditional Christianity. Their responsibility towards us is crucial due to the fact that their entrenched policy of Jewish rejection resulted in our exclusion from modern schemes aimed at improving the human condition. Since the Jews have had to work out their own solutions for survival as various ideologies bypassed them, simple human justice demands that the people of Israel be given the opportunity to build their future in their own way.

"Our undeniable return to historical reality has shaken the Christian world, and many are trying to discover our true identity. The prolonged period of exile and dispersion caused confusion as to the original purpose of our destiny through God, the Torah, and the Land of Israel. Restoration to our land was always seen as vital to bringing about the actualization of God's word to us and the rebuilding of the holy city of Jerusalem would bring blessings to all who held the God of Israel in reverence."

In a more hopeful tone, Manitu asked: "How can the will of God be

expressed only through the tiny people of Israel? Our roles need not compete with each other if Israel fulfils itself as God's witnesses through a nationally oriented religion and Christians work at universal acceptance of biblical vision and prophecy. Most of their concepts are taken from the Hebrew Bible, and the psalms of David are sung in all their prayers.

In conclusion, Manitu stated: "The Vatican has repeatedly refused to grant Israel official recognition. The people of the Bible which still exists in its own right unchanged by the revelation of Jesus continues to be a thorn in their side. But, at the same time, some Christians are reconsidering their understanding of the people of Israel. Contrary to popular belief, it is not our fault that creative dialogue does not flow freely between us. I am waiting for real signs of a change in former Christian thinking to one of respect for Judaism's view of redemption. As long as they continue to deny us, they are refusing to accept the people of Jesus, and the tradition from which he emerged. Their increasing awareness of what Judaism is must finally lead to true brotherly love and a world in which the spirit of God will reign supreme."

HUMANISM OF ISRAEL

To Prof. Neher, Judaism means, more than anything else, a way of bringing divine sanctification to bear on the entire realm of human endeavour. This is brought out clearly in the personality of Moses, the great lawgiver who, while dedicated to reforming the life of man and society, came into closer contact with the transcendental presence of God than any other mortal besides him. Moses is portrayed in the Bible as an assimilated Israelite whose concern for his enslaved brothers was aroused when he observed the heartless tyranny they were enduring. Such was the man who freed his people from cruel oppression in Egypt, the mightiest nation of ancient times, and taught them that living in holiness means justice among people.

Prof. Andre Neher was born in Strasbourg and taught at the University of Strasbourg until his *aliyah* to Israel about ten years ago. His insights into biblical meanings, his ideas on Jewish philosophy and contemporary Jewish existence, as expressed in the books he has written, and in lectures he has given, have brought him into prominence in Europe as well as in Israel. One of his books which was translated into English (as well as into Hebrew) is: *Moses and the Jewish Calling* in which Prof. Neher explains his humanistic-humanitarian theory of the Jewish manner of being "religious": in concise terms, it is an earthly existence that invokes the blessings of God.

This theory in itself would seem to exclude Jewish participation in the Christian religion of salvation. It is not only that the faith-community of the people of Israel bases its connection to the divine presence on its loyalty to the Torah, and therefore can accept no other intermediary. Judaism cannot envision fulfilling itself spiritually with a personal experience of faith as its chief criterion in which man's deeds take a place of relatively minor importance; it is impossible for the Jews to accept a figure who is both God and man—thereby neither one or the other specifically. Judaism, as Prof. Neher understands it, is founded on principles which separate the two realms, the divine and the human, in order to bring about the true harmony between them through man's efforts.

Still, he points out, it is possible for the Jews not only to tolerate different ways of reaching out to God, but even to appropriate and encourage them in-as-much as they are capable of doing so. "And here," he says sadly, "we come up against Christian obstinacy which refuses to see itself as anything but the absolute successor to the people of Israel originally identified with the (now) 'Old' Testament. Revelation through Jesus demands the 'chosen people's' total commitment according to almost all Christian authorities down to our time. The Jewish failure to respond to the 'New' covenant cannot possibly be tolerated according to most authentic Christian doctrines." "For them," Prof. Neher says, "this theological dilemma excludes the possibility of dialogue on an equal par with the people of Israel. It inevitably affects their ability to support, accept, or even come to any terms with the Jews as a modern, living people. It makes it very difficult for them to justify a reinstated Jewish Jerusalem. The fact that Christianity has a universal direction and that its central authority has long been entrenched in Rome does little to alleviate the tension caused by Israel's rebirth. The problem at the moment is for them, thus far insolvable."

Another major Jewish idea dealt with by Prof. Neher is the universal theme so outstanding in the words of the prophets of Israel. Far from being a people concerned exclusively with their own redemption and self-enhancement, the immediate and ultimate goal of Jewish existence has always been to rehabilitate the human condition through earthly resources and actions. Though heavenly inspired, the prophets dealt mainly with political stability, moral standards and ethical intercourse among people. Even the holiness of the Temple itself depended on man's ability to act justly; the goal of redemption is a material universe permeated with the dimension of the holy. According to the prophets, ritual purity is based on mundane standards of goodness and honesty, a theme

elaborated on by Prof. Neher in another of his foremost works, *The Prophetic Existence*. It is in this perspective only that we can understand Israel's vision of the ideal state for our troubled world, and we realize its incompatibility with the Christian way of individual spiritual salvation; that goodness and justice will be the natural result as man's existence becomes transformed through an experience that takes place in his soul. This is almost the exact reverse of the theme of Prof. Neher's interpretation of the destiny of the people of Israel. Other attempts to reach the kind of godliness revered by Jews are acceptable or it is possible to join the Jewish people. In any case, there are many dimensions to redemption and God may need all the "help" that His different children can offer for its full accomplishment.

So much for the theoretical clash whose repercussions are evident in the two millenium confrontation of Christianity with Judaism. The faithfulness of the Jews to the covenant God made with their forefathers has been seen as an act of religious betrayal! How, says Prof. Neher, is it possible to justify or explain the endless persecution to which the Christian churches have subjected the people that produced their redeemer. A European survivor of the Holocaust perpetrated by a ruthless band of criminals rebelling against the entire gist of what is termed "Judeo-Christian civilization," he finds it unforgivable that the Church has not taken radical measures to eliminate forever all of its anti-Jewish prejudices. Some distinguished Christian thinkers have expressed the conviction that a self-destructive impulse is implied in this hostility to the Jews. Leading voices demanding radical reconsideration of the traditional rejection of the Jews have suggested that it actually stems from a deep-seated resentment with regard to the true meaning of Christ. Those that say this claim that hatred of the Jews is hatred of Jesus in a thinly disguised form: a spiritual disease of Christianity.

The only real evidence of a new position on the Christian side has come from some Catholic circles in France largely due to the courageous inspiration of Jacques Maritain, says Prof. Neher. Though long aware of the Christian need to benefit from the faithful testimony demonstrated in the life of the Jewish people, Maritain adopted a more positive stand after the Holocaust, challenging the entire pattern of Christian thought concerning Israel. In his view, the children of Israel were chosen by God to keep the Torah and follow their own path to redemption. Maritain pleaded with Christians to see the Jews as eternally blessed, for having loyally fulfilled their own role in divine history, serving as witnesses to the original intent of God's revelation to them. Moreover, he pointed out, Christians should see in the Jews a living reflection of the message

Jesus conveyed to mankind, and should view their religious way of life as exemplary. Other attempts to reverse Christian attitudes have been few and far between; they include positive expressions by Protestant bodies as well. This in no way diminishes their value, even enhancing their effect and demonstrates great integrity on the part of those willing to come forth and announce their sorrow at the past while simultaneously planting the seeds of hope for a more promising tomorrow.

In a study recently reissued by the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel with the support of the American Jewish Committee's Israel office, a comprehensive analysis calling for unavoidable decisions is courageously presented by Father Jean Paul Lichtenberg who participated in Christian-Jewish dialogues in Strasbourg up until his untimely death in 1972. In reviewing the tragic results of Christian opposition to Judaism, Father Lichtenberg posed the question: "How would the Christians whose first commandment is love for their fellow men so hate the defenseless Jews, who are, moreover the blood brothers of Jesus? ... has the Church never entered the path of repentance?" In his introduction, he quoted Andre and Renée Neher who in an article on André Schwarz-Bart's novel *The Last of the Just* wrote: "Not only have the Christians of Europe inflicted inhuman suffering on the Jews, but they have also strangled the voice of redemption. Christian theology reproaches the Jews for having killed the 'First of the Just' while this book reproaches the Christians for having tried to murder the 'Last of the Just' (among the Jews)."

There is little we can do on our part, says Prof. Neher, towards improving the tone of interfaith relations as long as the majority of Christians are reluctant to face the problematics peculiar to the nature of their relationship with the Jews. Positive steps must be taken in order to pave the way for what both claim they aspire towards: a complete, universal redemption with peace for all and God's love spreading its light over everyone.

REALITY AND MYSTICAL VISION

Rabbi Benyamin Elon, born and educated in Jerusalem, a declared disciple of the teachings of the late Rabbi Isaac Hacoheh Kook, feels that the response of the Gentiles to the return to Zion is crucial to them, and the Jews. One of the most famous quotations from the Holy Scriptures to support this view are found in the verses which appear almost identically both in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4: "In the end of days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established and exalted above all other hills and nations shall stream towards it and many of them shall say: let us go and ascend the Lord's

mountain and go up to the Temple of the God of Jacob and we shall be taught His ways and follow His path, for Torah shall go forth from Zion and God shall speak from Jerusalem.”

Rabbi Elon is presently the rabbi of Kibbutz Shluhot in the Beisan Valley; he is one of the youngest people to fill a position of this kind. Though he is a *sabra*, he is keenly aware of the significance of Jewish identity in a much broader sense. His deep involvement with those who work the soil of the land stems from his conviction, borne out in the teachings of Rabbi Kook that the people of Israel by restoring themselves as a healthy nation enable God's presence to prevail for the peace of all mankind.

He is aware of the fact that the cosmic dimensions of Israel's destiny appear to be as much a threat, to some people, as a promise. But, Jewish self-assertion has always been viewed with hope mingled with fear. “The people of Israel,” he says, “were singled out to play a special role as servants of God as well as witnesses to His word after man proved his infidelity and demonstrated his persistence in doing evil. The Jews have been struggling ever since with this burden while living a life governed by stringent laws making them “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” and declaring daily that God was One—for all peoples, for all time.”

“This was a revolutionary concept and is still disputed,” said Rabbi Elon. “To posit one spiritual creator and ruler of the universe at a time when rival deities competed in the pagan atmosphere of lust and violence remains the greatest contribution of the Torah received through Moses, our teacher and lawgiver. Reducing the number of gods was not merely a numerical feat, he says; it was an irrefutable statement of a common destiny for all peoples, and implied mutual responsibility in creating a just society for all of mankind.

The onus of leading moral lives falls most heavily on the Jews themselves. The prophets of Israel were constantly chiding them about their ill treatment of widows and orphans, demanding justice for the poor as a major priority in leading the godly existence.

“At the same time,” continued Rabbi Elon, “the enemies of Israel are seen as being synonymous with the enemies of God Himself. The synagogue chant sung when the holy scroll of the Torah is removed from the ark has the words: ‘When the ark traveled, Moses said: Rise up and let your enemies disperse and flee your presence.’ And when it is

returned we sing: 'Be thankful for the earth and the heavens for He has raised the crown of His people. He is praised by His followers and by Israel, the people closest to His heart.' The Gentile world that opposes Israel cannot enjoy divine favour. We have faithfully preserved the ancient heritage of Israel and desire to use it for the good of all."

"In any case," says Rabbi Elon, "our religious teachings are sometimes accepted and adopted, while our historical role is constantly challenged. Judaism demands adherence to the same God, though Gentiles are expected to keep what is known as 'the Seven Noachide Laws.' These laws consist of the prohibition against idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, sexual immorality, theft and the commandment to set up courts of law and justice. The term 'righteous Gentile,' refers to someone who keeps these laws, and to a non-Jew who helps Jews at his own risk, which is equal to all the rest of the Torah. The spiritual direction of the people of Israel is fulfilment in worldly reality."

Rabbi Elon knows that sharp criticism is voiced against using divine promise to justify political realities. The problematics of such "mystical" convictions cannot be ignored, no more than can recognition of the deep truth of the central role of Israel in the divine scheme can be denied. He brings many quotes from the Holy Scriptures which state implicitly that the people of Israel are forever bound to God, that all their trials and tribulations must not deter anyone from seeing them as the people essential to bringing about the prophetic vision, unsurpassed in expressing what the fulfillment of human promise can mean. The late Rabbi Kook saw Israel as being instrumental in gathering "holy" sparks, using man's highest achievements in science, technology and every field of knowledge for the benefit of mankind. Our society is meant to reflect the true will of God who made man to keep the earth and tend it.

"The centuries of dispersion were always seen as a phase to be passed, and the return to Zion as necessary and inevitable," concludes Rabbi Elon. "We must not forget that true to biblical warnings the land lay fallow all this time and that its present reclamation must be regarded as a sign of God's blessings. The profound desire of the Jewish people to live in their land must also be recognized as demonstrating their readiness to help bring about the longed-for era of peace and harmony."

RELIGION AND BROTHERHOOD

Joseph Emanuel represents a committed Israel viewpoint not bound by strict halakhic categories or rabbinic judgment. It is important to bear

in mind ,however, that the term “non-religious” or “secular” regarding Jews in Israel and the Diaspora holds unusual connotations which shed light on the problems involved in defining Judaism. Disjunct aspects of identity recognized by society at large are misleading when applied to the Jewish people where nationality, religion, peoplehood, political loyalties, social rules of behaviour, etc., are overlapping elements. The Jewish personality emphasises the community of peoples relating to God, in contrast to the idea of personal grace, or passionate beliefs that cross boundaries of nations and cultures in sweeping movements. The Jew sees the whole person as walking before God, including his family and society which are all involved in the process. Thus, a non-synagogue going Israeli who consciously rejects personal or communal religion in the usual sense may be seen as deeply involved in the destiny of the people of Israel. Conversely, Jews living in remote places may sustain their identity by a greater emphasis on national or religious commitment. A trait may lie dormant when time or circumstance make other aspects of Jewishness more dominant, not because of calculated pragmatism, but rather as a result of temporary spiritual adjustment in accordance with the demands of the hour. A sense of the totality of the calling of the people of Israel is usually maintained, but this does not mean that for the Jew there is only one valid system. There is only one God and all men are brothers; the Torah is to be seen as reflecting God’s eternal truth. Each people may best serve God by learning from it, and attaining self-realization, through their own culture, language, national loyalty, etc. It is interesting to note that Christians have also begun encouraging greater local expressions among populations, e.g. in Asia and Africa that accept Christianity. Local language, architecture and music have come to be considered assets rather than as barriers to true religious expression.

In this way, one may understand Joseph Emanuel’s views on his identity vis-à-vis his fellow Jews and other peoples. “To me,” he says, “Zionism means the return to the family of nations. It is the longed-for opportunity of the Jewish people to realize its own potential. The challenge is greater than ever because it has come about in an era marked by advanced technical development which holds in the balance the promise of utopian existence on the one hand, and the threat of global catastrophe on the other. It is impossible to imagine living enclosed in a Jewish or Israeli ghetto. This would be against the original intention of our heritage, Emanuel said. Therefore everyone should welcome Israel’s liberation, and not seek ways to stifle its growth in any particular direction. We have arrived at the crucial hour of testing our ability to become a blessing to all nations as Abraham is told at the very start of his being

the first Hebrew. In reference to Jewish singularity, the purpose of particularism is to enable us to serve as God's witnesses, which means that the very fulfilment of our selfhood is a matter of the responsibility we carry towards other. Even while enduring centuries of persecution, there was always an exchange of ideas between us and others. Its effects are evident in our life and thinking. The Jewish contribution to the nations among which they lived is to be found in nearly every field of human endeavour."

Joseph Emanuel is an Israeli brought up in Haifa who comes from a family that left Poland for Zionist convictions. He studied at the famed "Reali" high school which shaped many of Israel's leaders. Emanuel also became prominent in the "Schechter Circle" made up of the followers of this original, modern thinker Yosef Schechter, who expounded ideals strongly influenced by traditional Judaism. He may be briefly described as having created an Israeli movement to develop the creative forces latent within our heritage, and use them to regenerate all aspects of our existence as a nation. For Joseph Emanuel, Judaism represents a deep concern with the human condition. Such concern has motivated his long standing involvement with communities outside of Judaism. He brought these ideas with him when he was appointed as Secretary-General of the Israel Interfaith Committee. He feels that obstacles from all over must be dealt with and overcome. Judaism never pretended to be "just" a religion but makes us feel responsible for what occurs in other areas as well, he says. Even though some rabbis place limitations, he stated—referring to Boston's Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik who enjoined against theological dialogue, it should not hinder holding encounters on various levels with other groups. Actually, all encounter the same difficulty in crossing the barriers when it comes to the very foundations of our faiths.

"There is no excuse for avoiding confrontations of any kind out of a position of weakness," he stated. Judaism has answers, and it is up to us, more than every before, to uncover its wisdom and translate its message realistically for our time. We are undermining our great heritage, he feels, by evading difficult issues engendered by the exigences of the present. The growing power of destructive philosophies institutionalized by totalitarian governments calls for an alignment of spiritual forces. We are called upon to prove in tangible ways, the contemporary efficacy of biblical teaching. Whatever the differences, it is wrong to deny the common denominator which Judaism, Christianity and Islam share apart from the affinity of all God-fearing people for each other. Our greatest sages and philosophers have attributed divine significance to the "daughter"

religions of Israel. Maimonides and Judah Halevi, Franz Rosenzweig, as well as many rabbis throughout the ages and up to the present have confirmed the special status of monotheistic beliefs in the biblical scheme of events. As far as the State of Israel is concerned, we should be perfectly willing to allow other groups to even co-exist with us in our land. We should implement a policy of equal rights for all citizens who cherish this country, and who wish to enjoy with us the fruits of our love for Zion and Jerusalem. We reserve for ourselves the privilege of shaping our own existence as is justified both by our ancient ties to this land, our centuries of suffering and oppression in other countries (which is still not a thing of the past), and also because of our reclamation of the land which was barren and neglected until our return.

There are some Moslem groups which have come to welcome the Zionist enterprise. We must do our utmost to convince all Arabs to drop their "policy of the sword" so as to allow profitable interchange to take place for our mutual benefit.

Regarding Christians, it is difficult to envision marked changes in their Christology which, in a sense, excludes the Jews from enjoying full divine favour. On the other hand, it would be foolish to disregard the transformation that has taken place in Christian attitudes towards studying and deriving inspiration from biblical sources in cooperation with Jews. There is a growing recognition among them of the integrity of Judaism for the Jews themselves. There is new desire for encounters, and a real intent to denounce "soul snatching". While there is still no official recognition of Israel from the Vatican, we should remember that recognition of the traditional link of the Jews with their land played a dominant role in bringing about international endorsement of Zionist aspirations. Judaism has been recognized by many as an organic part of their faith, there are attempts to do away with negative factors, and grapple with Christian responsibility for the persecution of the Jews culminating in the Holocaust of our time.

In conclusion, says Joseph Emanuel, we would do well to eliminate factors on our side which breed resentment. We should explore areas of mutual interest, and together, in a true spirit of brotherly love, seek solutions for some of the problems that plague modern society. There are many insights worth developing together; a genuine "marriage" of the spirit may emerge with great gain for all.

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