

## ISRAEL'S LITURGY AT THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN LITURGY - TEACHING ORALITY\*

Since its beginnings in times immemorial, Jewish prayer has been oral. It differs from Scripture, which wrote it down in part and which in return serves as its source when this is necessary. Prayer and other practices of the people of Israel, joined with various beliefs, constituted a lived reality which already bore the name of "Judaism"<sup>1</sup> before the appearance of the Pharisees in history. Credit is due to the Pharisees for having understood and taught that that "Judaism" was what the people was living according to oral Tradition. This was to be distinguished from Scripture, but to be given the same value as Scripture by acknowledging its status as Word of God. This oral Tradition, the oral Torah of the Pharisees, was never officially written down. It is true that the fact that it was put into writing, though this remained officious and partial, became generalized in the course of the centuries and profoundly modified the practice of its oral character. This latter, however, has kept no less of a theological and spiritual value even to our day, and it deserves to be better known.<sup>2</sup>

In a first step, I will show that Jewish prayer and in particular liturgical prayer, as I will make clear, is part of the oral Torah. It teaches faith and hope with authority, it sheds light on the practice of the commandments and all the dimensions of Jewish life, both the community and the individual dimensions.

In the second part, I will try to show how liturgical prayer, by means of its oral character, engages Israel in its relationship with God which constitutes its *raison d'être*. It is thus that the liturgy unfolds as service rendered to God according to three modalities which seem to be fundamental.<sup>3</sup>

By means of the "blessing" (berakhah), a privileged form of the liturgy, Israel refers everything to God, the author of creation.

By means of the "sanctification" (kedushah), the liturgical proclamation of God's sanctity, Israel expresses and teaches the paradox of revelation, the unity of the One God who is transcendent and immanent.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Second Book of Maccabees (2 Macc 2:21; 8:1) that was written around 125 and which, because of its characteristic traits, can be considered to be pre-Pharisaic. Cf. E. Nodet, *Essai sur les origines du Judaïsme*, Cerf, Paris, 1992, pp. 34-42.

<sup>2</sup> I want to mention K. Hruby's publications on the liturgy and its pertinence for Christian liturgy. Cf. in particular: *La proclamation de l'unicité de Dieu comme actualisation du Royaume*, in *La Liturgie expression de la foi*, Conférences Saint-Serge, XXV<sup>o</sup> semaine d'études liturgiques, Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma, 1979, pp. 147-158; *Le peuple de Dieu dans la liturgie juive*, in *L'Eglise dans la liturgie*, Conférences... XXVI<sup>o</sup> semaine..., Edizioni..., 1980, pp. 129-141; *Le sens et l'esprit de la liturgie*, in *La liturgie, son sens son esprit sa méthode*, Conférences... XXVIII<sup>o</sup> semaine..., Edizioni..., 1982, pp. 97-112; *La bénédiction comme formule de base de la liturgie juive*, in *Les bénédictions et les sacramentaux dans la liturgie*, Conférences... XXXIV<sup>o</sup> semaine..., Edizioni..., 1988, pp. 109-124; *Le peuple de Dieu dans la liturgie synagogale*, in *La prédication liturgique et les commentaires de la liturgie*, Conférences..., XXXVIII<sup>o</sup> semaine..., Edizioni..., 1992, pp. 275-295. These very enlightening writings did not emphasize the oral character of prayer. Thus, it is not impossible that my contribution to this 47<sup>th</sup> week of liturgical study at the Institut Saint-Serge will be useful and that my lecture's sub-title, "The Oral Character of Teaching", will prove to be reasonably justified.

<sup>3</sup> In presenting these three modalities as being fundamental, I am not excluding what remains the main thing in the liturgy, for example the liturgy's relationship to the Temple and to the Temple sacrifices.

By means of the “unification”, the liturgical proclamation of the divine unity, Israel illumines and upholds its journey towards universal redemption.

## I. ISRAEL’S LITURGICAL PRAYER IS PART OF THE ORAL TORAH

Israel’s liturgy is the established obligatory prayer (*tefillat ha-keba we-ha-hobah*) which was organized by the Pharisaic masters before and after the destruction of the second Temple (70 CE) and was taken on, reorganized, renewed and developed by their successors according to the needs of the people in response to circumstances.<sup>4</sup> From that liturgy, I will cite above all, elements which are taken from the two large daily units: the “Reading of the Shema” (*keriat shema*) and the “Standing Prayer” (*amidah*), which I will call from now on Shema and Amidah (or the plural Amidot).<sup>5</sup>

The liturgy is part of the oral Torah. We have the right to affirm this based on several traditional pronouncements, of which the most famous is attributed to Simon the Just: “The world rests on three things: on the Torah, on worship (service, *abodah*), and on reciprocal action inspired by love.”<sup>6</sup> Simon the Just is known as one of the last members of the “Great Assembly”.<sup>7</sup> He is perhaps Simon, the son of Onias, the high priest who is magnificently presented by Ben Sirach.<sup>8</sup> In any case, he preceded the Pharisaic masters, and he announced their teaching on Temple worship to which was linked the prayer of the synagogue, which was also seen as worship, as service (*abodah*), as we shall see further on. Other texts should be quoted and discussed in order to confirm the status of liturgy as oral Torah. Within the

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<sup>4</sup> What I say is based on J. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin-New York, 1977, pp. 218ff.

<sup>5</sup> In limiting myself to the essential in this way, I am again following J. Heinemann, *Ibid.* I think it would be useful to give here some information on the prayers which I will mention in this article and which I will quote in part, according to the version in the Ashkenazi rite except when I indicate otherwise.

The Shema (the “reading of the Shema”) is the individual prayer *par excellence*, although each person says it in reference to the community. It is said each day, in the evening and in the morning; it is made up of biblical readings and of blessings which enframe these readings. The Amidah, that is to say, the “standing”, is called thus because it is said standing, according to an age-old custom (for the explanation and interpretation of this “standing”, cf. U. Ehrlich, “When You Pray Know Before Whom You Are Standing” (*b Ber. 28b*), *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XLIX, no. 1, Spring, 1998, pp. 38-50). The Amidah is also called simply “Prayer” (*tefillah*); for it is the prayer *par excellence* of the community, the worship-service (*abodah*) of the heart (cf. *Deut 10:10*) which accompanied the service (*abodah*) of the altar, in particular the perpetual holocaust (burnt offering) offered by the community for the community. Today, after the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, the Amidot are said in reference to the burnt offerings of the morning, the afternoon and the additional burnt offering at the end of the morning on Shabbat and the feasts. Although there was no evening sacrifice in the Temple, the liturgy established an Amidah in the evening without however giving it the same status as the one during the day: the prayer is said only once, in a hushed voice, without the repetition out loud by the community. The Amidot for ordinary days are made up of 18 (now 19) blessings, the ones for Shabbat and feasts of 7 blessings, the additional Amidah for Rosh ha-Shanah of 9 blessings. The traditional name, “Eighteen Blessings” (*shemoneh esreh*) which was given to the Amidah, only fits for ordinary days, and even then it does not correspond to the present number of blessings, which is 19. This name, which is still upheld, has to its credit that it recalls the “18 Blessings” which existed before the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple.

<sup>6</sup> Mishnah, *Abot 1,2*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> “thing”, the “*gemilut hasadim*”, can be translated more briefly: for example as “charity”. But it is a shame not to translate the reciprocity which is expressed in “*gemilut*”. According to the most authorized interpretation, Simon the Just’s sentence teaches that the world rests on the Torah lived by Israel which unfolds (vertically) in the relationship with God, in worship (service) given to God, and (horizontally) in relations between human beings.

<sup>7</sup> Mishnah, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Sir 50:1-21*. Cf. however, E. Nodet, *Essai...*, pp. 215-222, who, in his attempt to identify Simon the Just and to situate him in time, does not take into account Ben Sirach.

limited framework of this presentation, it would seem to be sufficient to lean on the competence of learned Jews who are undisputed. I refer her to Solomon Schechter (1849-1915) and to Joseph Heinemann (1915-1978), who believe that the liturgy is the place where the main articles of Jewish faith and the fundamental points of Israel's hope are expressed with the greatest authority and are taught with the best security.<sup>9</sup>

The liturgy is part of oral Torah. Its oral character, like that of all of the oral Torah, is not just a theoretical qualification with theological value, which allows one to distinguish it from Scripture and to acknowledge its status as Word of God. The oral character of the liturgy, as of all of oral Tradition, was really implemented for the very reason that it had religious value, and it is such a practice which allows one to become most aware of its makeup and its development. Before we look at how modern research, with J. Heinemann, was renewed in the area of Jewish prayer, it is good to point out some previous stages in the rediscovery of the oral character of Israel's Tradition.

It was Saul Lieberman who first of all confirmed incontestably that the Mishnah, the basic collection of Israel's Tradition, was composed orally and published orally.<sup>10</sup> Modern source criticism no longer permits us to say that Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nassi, the last redactor of the Mishnah who was responsible for its publication, wrote the Mishnah. That same source criticism confirms the existence of theological positions which prescribed the real practice of orality and which justified the prohibition of putting oral Tradition into writing unless this were done in an officious way in order to help memory.<sup>11</sup> It is remarkable that people in the Jewish milieu could have been largely unaware of these realities for centuries. They probably were so due to the influence of the surrounding Christian and Muslim cultures, which in different ways emphasize writing.<sup>12</sup> If such "forgetting" is possible in Israel, we cannot be surprised that the Christians ignored to such a large extent and for so long that Israel's oral Tradition was the living Word of God in which the preached, oral Gospel of the early Church was shaped.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 1909 (1), Schocken Books, New York, 1961, pp. 10-11; J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 30ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. S. Lieberman, *The Publication of the Mishnah*, pp. 83-99 in *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950. The oral composition of the Mishnah was undertaken in Yavneh after the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, starting in the year 70 CE; its oral publication, through handing it over to a college of repeaters, was done at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The *terminus ad quem* of that publication was the year 219 CE.

<sup>11</sup> On the prohibition of putting oral Tradition into writing, cf. "The Literature of the Sages", in *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, Part I, S. Safrai (ed.), Van Gorcum, Assen/Maastricht-Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987, S. Safrai, *The Prohibition on Writing*, pp. 45-49.

<sup>12</sup> Considering the abusive use of the term "Religion of the Book" to designate Judaism, Christianity and Islam, this influence continues in our day. It is likely that this term is suitable for Islam as it defines itself in reference to the Qu'ran. It does not suit Judaism or Christianity, which are "Religions of Listening". Cf. what H. de Lubac says concerning Christianity: "Christianity is not strictly speaking a "religion of the Book": it is the religion of the Word, but not uniquely or principally the Word in its written form. It is the religion of the Word, 'not a written and mute Word, but incarnate and living'" (St. Bernard, hom. Miss. 4,11). (*L'Écriture dans la Tradition*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1966, p. 246). These lines of H. de Lubac were repeated anonymously, so as to give them more authority, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, §108.

<sup>13</sup> For the preached Gospel, cf. *1 Cor* 15:1-7, 11-12. Concerning the difficulty in acknowledging that the Church's Tradition presupposes the oral Tradition of the Pharisees at its origin, cf. O. Culmann, *La Tradition*, Delachaux & Niestlé, Neuchâtel-Paris, 1953, pp. 11,14-15,18,22,28; P. Benoit, *Inspiration de la Tradition et Inspiration de l'Écriture*, in *Mélanges offerts à M.D. Chenu*, Vrin, Paris, 1967, pp. 116-117. In addition, let us note that H. de Lubac and Y. Congar, who so magnificently showed the value and wealth of the Church's Tradition, did not see that it is based on the foundation which is the oral Torah of the Pharisees. Like Rabbi Eliezer, according to the Talmud (T.B. Hagigah 3b) and the Mishnah (Yadayim 4,3), we must weep for joy when we experience the coherence of the Torah in

The work of Birger Gerhardsson on the Pharisaic and rabbinical practice of oral transmission, as well as on the oral character of the first gospel traditions, must also be mentioned.<sup>14</sup> It is rightly appreciated by Jewish scholars.

To come back to prayer, its fundamental oral character, which is theologically justified and practiced, explains the fact that the first book of prayers, or rather the first written collection of an ensemble of prayers, only appeared in the 9<sup>th</sup> century under the authority of Rab Amram Gaon.<sup>15</sup> We have to wait until the 10<sup>th</sup> century to have a first prayerbook that was entirely composed and published in writing, the Siddur of Rab Saadya Gaon.

J. Heinemann's research culminated in the publication of the revised and definitive English version of his great book, *Prayer in the Talmud*.<sup>16</sup> His research confirmed that there does not exist in rabbinic literature an original version from which the various versions which were noted in the manuscripts then flowed.<sup>17</sup> In fact, there is a great variety of versions in Israel's liturgy, which are all to be considered as inspired to the extent in which they are transmitted and discussed in a responsible way by the communities which use them. This variety is attested to by the synchrony of multiple parallel versions which cannot be reduced to some original models.<sup>18</sup> For the diachronic development, which is based on the legitimacy of renewal (*hiddush*) in the living Tradition, we have for example authorized assertions which have in mind and justify the various stages in the community prayer (*Amidah*, the Eighteen Blessings, *Tefillah*). The fact that this prayer is attributed to the Patriarchs and then to Moses confirms its legitimacy. Its later development with Ezra, with the people of the Great Assembly, among whom there were prophets, happened in a historical context which is already more verifiable. The last major stage was the reorganization of Yavneh with Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabban Gamaliel, the grandson of Saint Paul's teacher.<sup>19</sup> At each stage, the renewal adapted and modified both the prayer's structure and its liturgical form or details of its contents. We shall see an example of this development further on in the case of the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing of the *Amidah*.

Thus, the liturgy is part of the oral Torah which precedes Scripture ontologically and chronologically. Israel's prayer necessarily existed before Scripture, which wrote down many of its expressions in the Torah (*Pentateuch*), the Prophets and the Hagiographa.

Scripture noted many individual or community prayers without always saying what their status was, how representative they were, or what authority they possessed, although the various biblical contexts often give precious indications. Tradition discusses these prayers in order to guess their origin, to shed light on their meaning and to verify whether they can be used in their totality or in part for the liturgy. In this way, the liturgy is enriched by biblical prayers in order to shed light on the life of the people in every age. For example, concerning

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hearing what H. de Lubac and Y. Congar said about the Tradition of the Church and what the Pharisees and their successors say until today about Judaism's oral Tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Memory and Manuscript*, Uppsala, 1961, and *Préhistoire des Evangiles*, Cerf, Paris, 1978. The fact that B. Gerhardsson was not interested in the theological foundation and the spiritual value of rabbinic oral transmission is perhaps a consequence of his Lutheran culture; he in no way passes judgment on the existence and the excellence of these realities.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. K. Hruby, *Autour du plus ancien rituel juif*, Cahiers Sioniens, December 1955, no. 4, pp. 303-336.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. footnotes 4 and 5.

<sup>17</sup> Concerning the criticisms of L. Finkelstein on his eclectic edition of Sifre on Deuteronomy, Berlin, 1939, cf. H.L. Strack – G. Stemberger, *Introduction au Talmud et au Midrash*, Cerf, Paris, 1986, p. 313, no. 79.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 37-76 and 288-291.

<sup>19</sup> For the rabbinic references concerning these stages and for the continuity which links them, cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 13ff.

the Canticle of the Sea (*Ex* 15:1-18) it is taught on the one hand, that it was sung by Moses and by the children of Israel in the Holy Spirit, and on the other hand, that the way in which it was sung is in relation to the way of reading the Shema Israel in daily individual prayer or of saying the Hallel in the community prayer for the pilgrimage festivals, for the new moon and for the Dedication.<sup>20</sup> What is done for a community biblical prayer of praise is also done for an individual prayer of petition like that of Moses after the sin with the Golden Calf (*Ex* 32:31-32; *Deut* 9:12-29) or like that of Hannah (*I Sam* 1:10-16).<sup>21</sup> In an open, discussed and always debatable way, these biblical prayers, like all of Scripture, are explicitly or not explicitly considered to be inspired and as having authority. They can thus be used in the liturgy or taken as a reference when deciding on how to pray.

The liturgy is not satisfied with using biblical prayers. It composes and establishes a multitude of prayers in which it has recourse to Scripture in order to uphold its assertions (for example, the proclamation of the Unity and Holiness of God), or it uses biblical words or formulae which strike a chord (for example, the God who “forms” and “creates” from *Isaiah* 45:7; the God who “builds Jerusalem” from *Psalms* 147:2). Finally, it proposes prayers which in no way allude to Scripture (for example, the old versions of the blessing which teaches the resurrection of the dead).

Whether its origin be known or not, the non-biblical prayer of the individual or of the community receives the authority of the oral Torah when it is established and obligatory liturgical prayer. Certainly, the origin and status of the various elements of the prayer are discussed.<sup>22</sup> Do their origin, their structure, their contents go back to Moses, and do they have Torah value in the strict sense, or do they come from the Ancient Prophets or from Ezra and Nehemiah or from the Men of the Great Assembly or from still more recent masters, in which case they would only have been instituted by the rabbis?<sup>23</sup> These discussions are legitimate and necessary, but they become relativized when situated within the grandiose Pharisaic perspective of the Word of God entrusted to a living people. The Pharisaic perspective will in fact end by expressing itself in the saying: “The custom of our fathers is Torah.”<sup>24</sup> This view of the Word of God is at the origin of the conviction expressed in the Catholic saying, “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*.”<sup>25</sup> We have here a fundamental element in the heritage which is common to Judaism and Christianity,<sup>26</sup> about which the Catholic Church has been speaking since the Second Vatican Council and which it invites Christians to discover.

We have to go a step further. It is because it is oral Torah, that the liturgy has the power to teach with authority doctrines and practices which have little support or even no support in Scripture. Of course, whenever possible, the liturgy leans on Scripture. It often has recourse to it in an explicit way or it uses Scripture through allusion, by means of resonances, modifying it when this is useful. But there are cases when the liturgy acts or teaches without any reference to Scripture.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on *Ex* 15:1, pp. 118-119.

<sup>21</sup> For Hannah’s prayer, cf. T.B. Berakhot 31ab; for that of Moses, T.B. Berakhot 32a.

<sup>22</sup> Concerning the discussion on the origin and status of the prayers, cf. for example J.H. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 13ff.

<sup>23</sup> To pinpoint these persons or groups, cf. E. Nodet, *Essai...*, pp. 210-281.

<sup>24</sup> Rabbi Isaac bar Yehudah (Mainz, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century), *Shibbolei Ha-Leqet*, Par. 296, Ed. Buber 129b (cf. P. Lenhardt – M. Collin, *La Torah orale des pharisiens*, Supplément au Cahier Evangile 73, Cerf, Paris, 1990, pp. 34-35).

<sup>25</sup> For the history of the saying, “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*” and for its good usage, cf. P. De Clerck, *La Maison-Dieu*, 222, 2000/2, pp. 61-78. It is a Pharisaic conviction that the liturgy is the expression and the school of faith. How was it communicated to the Christians? Did Saint Basil, who drew from the liturgy a teaching concerning the divinity of the Holy Spirit, know that the Jews had known for a long time about the inspiration of liturgical prayer and its power to teach?

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* of October 28, 1965; the Notes of the Commission for Relations with Judaism of June 24, 1985.

A first group of examples is given by certain age-old rites which came forth from the people's practice and for which Mosaic (or at least ancient) origin is claimed, which was never manifest in Scripture. Most significantly, there are the "norms of Moses from Sinai (halakhot le-moshe mi-sinai)" which, aside from their interest for the liturgy, have the merit of testifying to the coherence of the Torah of the Pharisees, which is made up of oral Torah and written Torah.<sup>27</sup> Whether it was in reference to Moses or other ancient authorities or not, the Pharisees considered the practice of the people to be normative, to be oral Torah. Alongside the "norms of Moses from Sinai", there are numerous decisions that were made by legitimate authorities without reference to Scripture, or that were accepted as such without having been challenged, as far as is known, that were adopted by the liturgy and that by that very fact, ended up being acknowledged as Torah.<sup>28</sup>

A second group of examples can be found in the liturgical prayers which teach the resurrection of the dead, a specifically Pharisaic hope which was denied by the Sadducees. From among these prayers, we shall study the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing of the Amidah further on. From this example, the link between this specific doctrine of the Pharisees and their idea of the Torah becomes apparent. Their teaching concerning the resurrection, based on Scripture or not, was not only made possible by means of their oral Torah. It flowed from the oral Torah itself, which was given to a living people so as to make of each person in Israel a living Torah which is stronger than death.<sup>29</sup>

These two types of examples suffice to show the power which the liturgy has: it is oral Tradition entrusted to a living people; when necessary, it can uphold or innovate practices or beliefs independently of Scripture.

To conclude these introductory remarks, we can say that the liturgy, as an expression of the oral Torah, is a Word which, in an adequate way, brings praying persons or communities into relationship with their God. This Word is praise and petition; it is addressed to God who creates the world, who reveals himself in the world and who leads the world to redemption. The forms which the liturgy assumes and which we will now look at, correspond to the status of this Word and to its functions.

## II. THE LITURGY IS SERVICE RENDERED TO GOD

As we saw, worship is one of the three things on which the world rests.<sup>30</sup> In an anonymous debate, ancient Tradition, which is contemporary with the New Testament, asked itself after the destruction of the Temple how to fulfill the verse from *Deut* 10:10: "Surely, if you really obey my commandments..., loving the Lord your God and serving him with all your heart..." How is the "service of the heart", which is thus prescribed, to be understood and fulfilled? Two main interpretations were proposed. According to the first, the "service-worship (*abodah*) of the heart" is "Prayer" (*tefillah*), that is, in the context, the Amidah, which is the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. P. Lenhardt – M. Collin, *La Torah orale des pharisiens...*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>28</sup> This reality of decisions by the authority without consultation (*taqqana*, *taqqanot*) is particularly well attested in the activity of John Hyrcanus, the high priest (Yohanan kohen gadol). It was known and acknowledged by the Pharisees as being a positive reality, as is attested by the mention of decisions made by John Hyrcanus in the Mishnah and in other rabbinic collections. Cf. E. Urbach, *The Halakhah, its sources and its development*, Yad la-Talmud, Massada Ltd., 1986, pp. 43-58. Analogous decisions were made later, during the time of the Pharisees and with their *a posteriori* approbation, by Hillel (at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE) and by Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Temple (70 CE).

<sup>29</sup> Each person in Israel is a living Torah, at least potentially. Cf. Rashi (1040-1105) on T.B. Shabbat 105b le-sefer torah.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. footnote 6.

prayer of the community, the prayer *par excellence*, the prayer which is inseparable from the service-worship of the altar (the sacrificial worship), the prayer which recalls this and which takes its place since the destruction of the Temple. According to the second interpretation, the “service of the heart” is the “Talmud”, *Talmud Torah* (study-teaching of the Torah).<sup>31</sup> The two interpretations shed light on each other, for the love of God requires both the knowledge of God and the prayer addressed to God.<sup>32</sup>

The liturgy serves God by doing his will, by establishing the inspired, adequate and effective word which the people addresses to its Creator (blessing), to the One who reveals to it his Word (sanctification), to its Redeemer (unification).

## 1. Blessing

Since the beginning, the “blessing” (berakhah) has been for Israel the means of expressing that God is the origin and the source of all that is good: of the existence and the life of every creature, of fertility and of food, of drink, of every action in God’s service, of every happiness, etc.<sup>33</sup> Israel is given countless opportunities to experience and to declare that God is “blessed” (barukh).<sup>34</sup> The passive participle doubtlessly means that God is the object of the blessing spoken by the human person, but it is known that God is “in himself the source of the blessings.”<sup>35</sup>

The Hebrew Bible contains blessings in which God is mentioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person and others which are addressed to God who is aimed at directly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person.<sup>36</sup> These variations express experiences which preceded their being written down.

Such precedence is clearly attested to in the book of Nehemiah (9:5ff.), where we have traces of a liturgy which began with a prescribed blessing:

Stand up and bless the Lord (YHWH) your God from everlasting to everlasting.  
Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

The liturgy of the synagogue, for its part, begins the evening and morning prayer in the following way:

Bless the Lord, the Blessed One.  
Blessed are you, Lord (YHWH), the Blessed One, for ever and ever.

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<sup>31</sup> Sifre on Deut 11:13, pp. 87-88. Cf. also footnote 5. Concerning the link between the “Prayer” and the sacrificial worship, cf. P. Lenhardt, *La valeur des sacrifices dans le judaïsme d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui*, in *Le sacrifice dans les religions*, M. Neusch (ed.) Beauchesne, Paris, 1994, pp. 61-84.

<sup>32</sup> Concerning the knowledge of God and the practice of Talmud Torah required by the love of God, cf. Abot de Rabbi Nathan A, chap. 4, 9b on Hos 6:6.

<sup>33</sup> Further on, we will show the obligatory and established character of the blessings prescribed by Tradition in the cases which it foresees. Let us note already here the importance of the blessings to be said before fulfilling the commandments prescribed by the Torah. These blessings express that the Holy God is the origin of the sanctification which comes about through the practice of the commandments.

<sup>34</sup> Rabbi Meir said: “A person is obliged to bless with 100 blessings each day...” (T.B. Menahot 43b).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Abudirham (ca. 1340) on the blessing for the washing of hands, *Abudirham ha-Shalem*, Jerusalem 1963, pp. 33-34: “‘blessed (barukh)’ is not a passive form but, like the forms ‘raham (compassionate)’ and ‘hannun (who is gracious)’, means that He is Himself the source of the blessings and that He does not receive them from others (than Himself).”

<sup>36</sup> For the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, cf. *Gen* 24:27; *Ex* 18:10; for the 2<sup>nd</sup> person, *Ps* 119:12 and *Neh* 9:6 (although the direct address to God is not explicit). The New Testament contains blessings in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person spoken by Jesus: *Mt* 11:25; *Lk* 10:21; *Jn* 11:41-42. In *Eph* 1:2ff. we have a blessing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person.

The similarity is striking: the people responds to the invitation of the Levites (Nehemiah) or of the “envoy of the community” (the “*shaliah ha-tsibbur*” of the prayer of the synagogue), with a “blessing” addressed to God in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person.<sup>37</sup> The fact that the wording is not identical is a valuable indication of the ancient oral character of the liturgy of the synagogue. It did not copy Scripture; it used an oral tradition which was parallel to the one written down in Scripture in the book of Nehemiah (9:5).

Thus, the synagogue liturgy uses blessings which are analogous to the biblical formulae. It received its own formulae both from oral Tradition which preceded Scripture and from Scripture, which in certain cases was obviously taken as a model.<sup>38</sup>

Since J. Heinemann dealt with these questions with great clarity, it is not necessary to repeat the results of his research here. I intend rather to emphasize a few important points which he established and to point out their theological and spiritual value.

First of all, it is significant that the public prayer of which the book of Nehemiah kept a trace, and the evening and morning prayer in the liturgy of the synagogue begin in an almost identical way with an invitation to bless, which is followed by a blessing. That is to say that blessing is the basic praise with which every prayer by which the creature addresses his or her creator begins. Tradition is not satisfied with giving the blessing the first word in prayer. It favors the blessing to the point that the liturgy of the synagogue is made up mainly, not to say exclusively, of blessings, and that the blessing very especially has liturgical character: it is obligatory and established.

*Blessing is obligatory* in the cases foreseen by Tradition in virtue of the principle according to which every person who uses a reality of this world without referring it to the Creator God, is committing a sacrilege or a theft.<sup>39</sup> These are the kind of crimes which are committed when one touches realities which are of divine origin and thus holy or sacred, or also when one appropriates to oneself goods which belong above all and always to their creator. By means of the blessing and after it, the realities or goods for which one has blessed belong from then on fully to the human person, with all the divine strength that has been placed in them by the creator.

The blessing over bread is the best example one can give to illustrate the value of the blessing and its effectiveness. First of all, this blessing is prescribed by Scripture for the bread (or for food in general) which will not be lacking in the land of Israel (*Deut* 8:10): “You shall eat, you shall be filled, and you shall bless the Lord (YHWH) your God for the good land that he has given you.” Tradition insists on basing on Scripture the obligation to bless for bread.<sup>40</sup> In the case of bread, the scriptural support cannot be contested by anyone; thus, this constitutes a major reference for all the other uses of goods which, according to Tradition, require a blessing. For bread is the food *par excellence*, and food is the need *par excellence* which God has placed within creation. It was to satisfy the need for food that God gave Israel its land.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The similarity is more striking when one follows the translation of the Jerusalem Bible (in French) (*Neh* 9:5): “Stand up, bless the Lord our God.” *Blessed are you, Lord our God*, from everlasting to everlasting. And may your glorious name be blessed which is exalted above all blessing and praise.” The words in italics are not in the original. It is probable that the people said them, as it still does in the liturgy of the synagogue.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. footnotes 20 and 21.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. T.B. Berakhot 35ab.

<sup>40</sup> Tradition is concerned with showing the coherence of “all of the Torah” (written Torah and oral Torah). It is good to show that the (oral) practice is in conformity with Scripture.

<sup>41</sup> Material food is not the only reason for the gift of the land, as the entire book of Deuteronomy indicates. Cf. also the footnote below. On the other hand, the land promised to the fathers and given to Israel signifies and announces eternal life after the resurrection. Cf. T.B. Sanhedrin 90b on *Deut* 11:21;



By means of the blessing, the bread receives the divine and sacred quality which God placed in it by creating it.<sup>42</sup>

*The blessing is established.* It can only be spoken in the cases foreseen by Tradition and in the way established by it.<sup>43</sup> At the time of the New Testament, only the form of the blessing and the essential of its contents were established. For several centuries now, the institution understands itself in a rigid way: the entire blessing, the liturgical form and the content of the praise or petition, must be spoken according to the letter. A trace of the former freedom is maintained in the recommendation not to make of often repeated prayer a routine practice, but to renew it by interiorizing the meaning of the words spoken.<sup>44</sup>

In order to better understand what blessing is, I want to examine the first blessing preceding the “reading of the Shema”, with which the morning prayer begins.<sup>45</sup> We shall look at it a first time in order to hear the teaching on creation which flows from its structure and content. Further on, we shall look at it again to see how its teaching is given in the oral transmission, with or without recourse to Scripture.

### *The 1<sup>st</sup> Blessing before the Morning Shema (Yotser)*

This blessing celebrates God as the Creator; it teaches that God forms (*yotser*, in the present, according to *Isa* 45:7) light and all things by means of an ongoing creation, for “through mercy he enlightens (in the present) the earth and those who dwell on it,” and “in his goodness, he renews (in the present) each day, constantly, the act of the beginning.”<sup>46</sup> This daily teaching, given at the beginning of the liturgy, prepares people to imitate the “heavenly Father” in his perfection, him who “makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous.”<sup>47</sup>

This blessing, with which the pedagogy of the evening and morning prayer begins, celebrates God as the author of creation. The other blessings for the “reading of the Shema” bless God as the author of revelation (and of election) and of redemption. They teach that God reveals himself out of love and commits himself in redemption. Still more basically, all of these blessings teach by means of the liturgical formula that God is the source of all that is good. Now we must emphasize the rich significance of this liturgical formula.

The liturgical formula includes at least the following words: “Blessed are you, Lord (YHWH)”, which precede the body of the blessing when this begins with the liturgical formula, or which precede at the very least the conclusion of the blessing.<sup>48</sup>

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*Acts* 13:32; 26:6; P. Lenhardt, *La Terre d’Israël, Jérusalem, le Temple - Leur valeur pour les juifs et pour les chrétiens*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 1, December 1996, pp. 133-137.

<sup>42</sup> Thus, the blessed bread is already spiritual nourishment. The eucharistic blessing rests on a first level of Jewish blessing over bread. This first level is assumed, not made to vanish, by the level of the Eucharist. The double blessing which is attested by the *Didache* enables us to distinguish the levels.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Maimonides (1135-1204), *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1,15.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Mishnah Berakhot* 4,4; *Mishnah Abot* 2,13; *T.B. Berakhot* 29b; *T.J. Berakhot* 4,3,8a.

<sup>45</sup> The first blessing preceding the “reading of the Shema” in the evening prayer also celebrates the Creator God, like that of the morning. It is less developed than that of the morning, and we do not need to study it here.

<sup>46</sup> On the “ongoing creation” cf. H. de Lubac, *La Révélation Divine, Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de la constitution “Dei Verbum” du concile Vatican II*, Cerf, Paris, 1983, pp. 63-69. Cf. also P. Lenhardt, *La Terre d’Israël...*, pp. 109-111.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Mt* 5:44-47.

<sup>48</sup> Here, I shall not enter into greater detail; this would be too difficult to summarize for those who do not know Israel’s Tradition well, and too tedious for those who do know it.

The word “blessed (barukh)” is necessary. This word, with what it signifies, is what gives the blessing its status as an established and obligatory prayer.<sup>49</sup>

The word “you” makes of the blessing a prayer addressed to God, a prayer which is distinguished from the blessings which speak of God in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. The blessings in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person have their significance. In Scripture as in Tradition, they have the function of concluding the study and teaching which leads to prayer. That is why the liturgy, for example in the prayer of the night of Passover, carefully retains them in order to heighten the teaching of the Haggadah. However, it is the formula with “you” which was favored by the Sages, to the point of being imposed on previous blessings which had been in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. Numerous traces of this “takeover by force” are maintained in the most standard liturgical blessings and they do not fail to surprise the uninformed listener.<sup>50</sup> These anomalies show the power of oral transmission; for when the Jew prays, he or she must remain conscious of the paradox of the revelation which has been given: God, whom he or she blesses in the second person, is present in his/her prayer; but in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, God in his divinity remains absent. The shocking formula must shake the routine of a prayer that is often repeated.<sup>51</sup>

God is designated by his proper name which is revealed, ineffable (YHWH) and which the Jews replace by “*Adonai*” when praying.<sup>52</sup> This designation by the ineffable name is specific to established prayer, which can lean on the biblical model given in Psalm 119:12: “Blessed are you, Lord (YHWH); teach me your statutes.” The blessings which speak of God in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, designate God by means of substitutes among which the “Place (makom)” and the “Holy One, blessed be He!” were the most wide-spread at the beginning of our era.

The liturgical formula guarantees that God is present to the prayer being addressed to him by means of the blessing.<sup>53</sup> This has several consequences.

First of all, God’s presence to the blessing addressed to him demands that this blessing be established and obligatory. These two characteristics, about which we have already spoken, must not cause the prayer to become “established” in the sense of rigidly set and routine.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, through the liturgical form, the blessing is necessarily a praise addressed to God, praise of God who is present, praise which strengthens and at the same time relativizes what is expressed in the body of the blessing: praise or petition. Here we could present the debate which is still open as to which is more important, praise or petition. However, in this presentation it is enough to retain that frequent contact with the liturgy of Israel teaches above

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. footnote 35.

<sup>50</sup> Here, for example, is the beginning of the blessing which is said before doing a commandment: “Blessed are you, Lord (YHWH), King of the universe, who has sanctified us through his commandments...;” and the conclusion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing preceding the “reading of the Shema” in the morning: “Blessed are you, Lord, who has chosen his people Israel out of love.”

<sup>51</sup> On this shocking co-existence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person, cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 77ff. Contrary to what he thinks, I believe that we must maintain the traditional explanations of this “anomaly”. J. Heinemann speaks of some of them. There are others, and they are all interesting.

<sup>52</sup> It is well known that during the time of the Temple only the High Priest pronounced the ineffable name on the day of Kippur. Following the Septuagint (*kyrios*) and the Vulgata (*dominus*), it seems indicated that we replace the ineffable name by “Lord”.

<sup>53</sup> God’s presence is assured through the fact that the person or community addressing God through the blessing legitimately calls upon his Name. Cf. Mishnah Abot 3,2 and 6; T.B. Berakhot 6a. The best supporting verse is *Ex* 20:24: “In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.” Cf. also *Mt* 18:20, according to which Jesus applies to himself the formula which designates the Shekhinah, the Divine Presence to the community or the person praying. Cf. P. Lenhardt, *La Tradition d’Israël sur la Présence Divine (Shekhinah) dans le Temple et dans le monde éclaire la foi chrétienne en l’Incarnation*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 2, June 1997, pp. 145-147.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. footnote 44.

all the importance of contact with God, which is guaranteed through the blessing.<sup>55</sup> Certainly, God is basically blessed and praised as the source of all good. But God is also blessed because he is the creator of our needs and of the means by which these are satisfied.<sup>56</sup> Thus, one can never minimize the petition or even present it as being inferior to praise.

Blessing is thus theological; it touches God; its praise is adequate and its request is effective. This is what the 16<sup>th</sup> blessing of the community prayer for ordinary days teaches. This blessing, the last of the blessings of petition in this prayer, ends thus: “Blessed are you, Lord (YHWH), who hear (answer) the prayer (*shome’a tefillah*).” Here, Tradition uses the formula in Psalm 65:3, abbreviated, for prayer: “You hear prayer (*shome’a tefillah*); to you all flesh comes.” On the other hand, we know that the complete formula, with “to you all flesh comes,” when it is well interpreted, sheds light on and upholds the request of each person who prays.<sup>57</sup>

The blessings are not all of the established and obligatory prayer. They are part of it, and the established and obligatory prayer, in turn, is only part of the oral Torah. It is the oral Torah which establishes and prescribes the liturgy and the blessings, which organizes their structure and determines their content. It decides on the Scripture readings to be used in the liturgy. Thus, the oral Torah prefers the daily reading of the Shema to that of the Decalogue.<sup>58</sup> The prayer Shema Israel is called “reading of the Shema” because it includes the reading of three passages from Scripture. This reading of the Shema, which is made up of three paragraphs (*Deut* 6:4-9; *Deut* 11:13-21; *Num* 15:37-41), is preceded by two blessings: the first, about which we have already spoken, celebrates God as the author of creation; the second blesses God as author of revelation (and of the election of Israel, to whom this revelation is entrusted). These two blessings prepare pedagogically for the reading of the Shema, the essence of which is the proclamation of the Unity of God and the commandment to love him. The reading is followed by a third blessing which celebrates God as author of redemption. This pedagogical framework, creation, revelation (election), redemption, was considered to be the best for teaching the Unity of God and the “unification”, of which we will speak again further down.

Not only the content of the blessings is significant; above all, their structure ensures the basic teaching: the ineffable Unity of the One God can only be approached by means of the diversity of God’s manifestations.

Similarly, the oral Torah is not satisfied with prescribing the “Eighteen (now 19) Blessings” of the community prayer for ordinary days and with determining their content; it organizes their structure: Three blessings of praise at the beginning, 13 blessings of petition in the middle, three blessings of praise at the end. Above all else, this teaches not only that praise has the first and the last word, but that petition, which is placed in the center, is not inferior to praise.

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<sup>55</sup> Here we can quote Psalm 16:8: “I have placed the Lord always before me.” This verse is often written on the entrance to synagogues. It serves as a support to the conviction that God makes himself present to Israel in prayer. Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), the founder of modern Hassidism, interpreted this verse thus: “I have placed (*shiviti* = I have made equal), the Lord is always before me.” (*Tsawwaat ha-Ribash*.§2) For if everything is equal, relative, secondary in relationship to God, God is always before me. And reciprocally.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the blessing to be said for consuming certain food and drink: “Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the world, who create countless souls and their needs, for all that you have created to make live the soul of all that lives...”

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer*, Ed. H.G. Enelow, The Bloch Publishing Company, New York, 1933, Chapter 11, p. 211.

<sup>58</sup> On that preference of the Shema Israel, cf. E. Urbach, *The Sages...*, pp. 25-27.

Since our plan was not to enumerate all the articles of faith taught by the liturgy, but to show how the oral character of the liturgy shows its power to teach with or without recourse to Scripture, I shall content myself with giving three examples. I shall go back to the 1<sup>st</sup> blessing before the morning Shema, which we already studied, to show how it teaches faith with or without recourse to Scripture. I shall then look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing before the morning Shema, and finally the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing of the daily Amidah.<sup>59</sup>

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> blessing before the morning Shema prepares for the proclamation of the divine Unity by excluding all dualism; in order to do so, it uses Scripture, modifying it so as to make it acceptable.

As we already saw, the blessing teaches the “ongoing creation” by making its own the words of *Isaiah* (45:7) which are formulated with the present participle; in the prayer, this allows one to say in the second person: “who make light and create darkness, who make peace and create everything.” The word “everything” is used by the prayer in place of what the prophet says: “and I create evil (misfortune), I am the Lord who make all these things.” This “correction” is, of course, discussed in the Talmud.<sup>60</sup> It is considered to be a euphemistic arrangement. The formula, “who create *everything*”, which replaces “who create evil”, can be considered equivalent to “who make all these things”; it includes the evil of which the prophet speaks and which nobody could “conjure away”. The prayer’s message thus remains that of *Isaiah*; its expression is toned down, but it is upheld in its radicality: the Creator God is beyond all his creation; evil cannot have the first or the last word, which belongs to God alone. Created reality does not allow one to attain or to undermine the Unity of its creator. The message does not suppress the scandal of the presence of evil and the suffering of innocent people in the world; but it does offer the consolation which *Isaiah* teaches to the one who can hear it in faith and prayer.

We must note that here Scripture is called upon by means of resonance, through a formula which is adequate for serving as support to the prayer’s teaching; but Scripture is not explicitly quoted. Nevertheless, the use of *Isaiah* is so obvious that the formulation which the prayer proposes for the passage constitutes an interpretation which can be considered a real expression of the prophet himself. Thus, the text of the prayer becomes a “second Scripture” which can be quoted as Scripture. In an analogous way, the old anonymous midrash on *Lev* 26:6 engenders a “second Scripture”. That midrash teaches: “So that you might not say, ‘we might have food and drink, but if we do not have peace, we shall have nothing,’ the Talmud says (*Lev* 26:7): ‘And I will give peace in the land.’ This teaches that peace is worth as much as everything ... and this is what (Scripture, *Isa* 45:7) says: ‘I make peace and I create everything.’”<sup>61</sup> Scripture is quoted according to the version given in the prayer.<sup>62</sup>

2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing before the morning Shema prepares for the proclamation of the divine Unity and the commandment of love; in order to do so, it uses Scripture in order to teach the unification of the heart through the fear and love of God.

Two scriptural passages are used: (*Ps* 86:11) “Unify my heart so that it might fear your name,” and (*Deut* 10:12), “(And now... what is the Lord your God asking of you,) that you fear (the Lord your God...), that you love him...” By fusing these two passages and putting

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<sup>59</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> blessing of the Amidot, which teaches the holiness of God with important recourse to Scripture, will be studied further on in the part dealing with ‘sanctification’. Cf. footnote 75.

<sup>60</sup> T.B. Berakhot 11b.

<sup>61</sup> Sifra on *Lev* 26:6, 111a.

<sup>62</sup> Rashi on *Lev* 26:6 follows Sifra and has no problem quoting *Isaiah* as modified by the prayer.

them into the first person plural, the prayer thus formulates its petition: “Unify our heart so that it might love and fear your name.”<sup>63</sup>

Thus, it anticipates the proclamation of the divine Unity and prepares for it by requesting the unification of the heart. The ineffable Unity of God is entrusted to the unified heart of the praying community.

3. The 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing of the daily Amidah teaches that God causes the dead to live. This teaching is given without recourse to Scripture. The two preceding examples showed that Scripture, which is called upon by means of resonance, receives its authorized interpretation in that prayer’s context from prayer as oral Torah. For the resurrection of the dead, oral Tradition knows well that it is dealing with a popular, age-old belief which preceded the appearance of the Pharisees in history and which is difficult to justify by means of Scripture. That is why the oldest versions of this blessing do not include any explicit recourse to Scripture by means of a quotation; they don’t even cause Scripture to be heard by means of resonance. This shows the power of the liturgy to teach what it has to teach. It must and can teach the resurrection of the dead without any support from Scripture. This obligation and power of Tradition are not doubted. It is a matter of teaching the resurrection of the dead, and not the immortality of the soul, with all the improbability this represents in the eyes of many, Greeks and Jews. The liberal current in Judaism rejected such a teaching and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it modified the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing, making it say in its conclusion, instead of “Blessed are you, Lord, who causes the dead to live,” “Blessed are you, Lord, who causes everything to live.”<sup>64</sup>

The liturgical blessing anchors Jewish life in its relationship with God. It guarantees the authenticity of the “sanctification of the Name”, which is entrusted to the liturgy. It gives its meaning to the practice of the commandments, by which Israel sanctifies itself. We shall now talk about this sanctification and its various modalities.

## 2. Sanctification

The Lord God is Holy (*Lev* 19:2). God wants to be sanctified by Israel (*Ex* 22:31-32). He wants Israel to sanctify itself by imitating God (*Lev* 19:2) and by fulfilling God’s commandments (*Ex* 22:31; *Num* 15:40).

Israel is the “people of those who sanctify the Shabbat.”<sup>65</sup> More generally and adequately, Israel is called “Israel which sanctifies your Name.”<sup>66</sup> Israel is, in fact, obliged to “sanctify the Name,” an obligation which extends even to martyrdom when the persecutor wants to prevent Israel from witnessing to God by means of practicing the commandments.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> This transformation of Scripture not only shows the power of innovation which the oral Torah has; it also illustrates the oral Torah’s conviction that it is able to show the coherence of “all of the Torah” (Scripture and Tradition) concerning the unification of the heart in love and fear. The prayer’s formulation is in resonance with the old, anonymous teaching of the midrash on *Deut* 6:5: “You have no love with fear and no fear with love unless it is in the relationship with God.” (Sifre on *Deut* 6:5, p. 54)

<sup>64</sup> The formula is inspired by Nehemiah (9:6): “You cause them all to live.” To cause all the living to live is not to cause the dead to live.

<sup>65</sup> The central blessing of the morning Amidah and of the supplementary Amidah for Shabbat.

<sup>66</sup> Literally, “Israel the sanctifiers of your Name” (Israel mekaddeshei shmekha). The central blessing in all the Amidot for Shabbat.

<sup>67</sup> It is significant that Maimonides mentions Israel for the first time in the grandiose introduction preceding his code by saying: “All of the House of Israel is obliged to sanctify this great Name, as it is

Thus, the “sanctification of the Name” is the testimony concerning the Holy God which is given by the holy people (*Ex* 19:5), by the people which is obliged to be holy as God is Holy (*Lev* 19:2).<sup>68</sup> According to the Pharisees (*perushim* - those who are separated), the imitation of the Holy (Entirely Other, separate) God demands separation (*perishut*), moderation in the legitimate use of certain goods of the world.<sup>69</sup> Positively, the “sanctification of the Name” happens through the observance of the commandments, which Israel fulfills in order to be consecrated to God.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the “sanctification of the Name” demands the sanctification of Israel. Through Israel, it is then extended to the realities of the world which Israel has the obligation to sanctify according to the modalities prescribed by the Torah.<sup>71</sup> The sanctification of the Name, which is entrusted to Israel, does not surrender God’s holiness into the hands of Israel.<sup>72</sup> God remains Holy, inaccessible and nevertheless knowable through his Glory. It is the role of the liturgy to teach this.<sup>73</sup>

The liturgy proclaims God’s holiness (*kedushah*) by citing a unit made up of two passages from Scripture (*Isaiah* 6:3 and *Ezekiel* 3:12), which are linked by a liaison text which varies according to the time of the prayer. This unit itself has the technical name of “*Kedushah*”, and it is almost always included in a blessing.<sup>74</sup> The blessings which include the “*Kedushah*” are: the 1<sup>st</sup> blessing preceding the morning Shema and the 3<sup>rd</sup> blessings of the Amidot for ordinary days, for Shabbat and for feasts. Since the inclusion of the “*Kedushah*” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> blessings of the Amidot was the *raison d’être* for these blessings, it is customary to call them

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said (*Lev* 22:32): ‘so that I might be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel’” (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah 5,1).

<sup>68</sup> Israel is obliged not only to be holy as God is Holy, but also to “walk in all God’s ways” (*Deut* 11:22), to imitate God in mercy, justice, humility, perfection...

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Sifra on *Lev* 19:2, 86c. The program of Pharisaic “separation”, moderation, sobriety is perfectly described and justified in the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Saint Peter (1:13-16).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph of the Shema (*Num* 15:37-41) which is read twice a day: “Thus, you will remember all my commandments, you will put them into practice, and you will be consecrated (*kedoshim*, holy, sanctified) to your God.”

<sup>71</sup> Without going into detail, we can say that Israel must “sanctify” certain realities in time and space: the time of Shabbat and the feasts, the land of Israel, the space of the Shabbat, etc... For time, the sanctification is done by means of a blessing which is called “*Kiddush*” and is made appropriate to each case. For the Land of Israel, the sanctification was done by means of the entry into the Land at various stages, at different periods in biblical history; such a sanctification, of which the modalities and the consequences remain disputed, does not, of course, justify the possession by the State of Israel of lands belonging to non-Jewish owners.

<sup>72</sup> Obviously, God’s sanctity does not depend on Israel’s sanctity nor on the proclamation of that sanctity by Israel (Sifra on *Lev* 12:2, 86c). As we saw for the blessing, the role of Israel is only to make God known as the Creator of all of reality, as Holy, separate from the world, but wanting paradoxically to manifest himself in the world.

<sup>73</sup> I will talk about this principal role of the liturgy concerning God’s sanctity. I want to make clear that the “*Kaddish*” prayer, which is established and obligatory in certain circumstances, begins with the words: “May his great Name be magnified and sanctified...!” This formula and the fact that God is called further on in the prayer, “the Holy One, blessed by He!” does not constitute a teaching on the sanctity of God. However, we shall see further on what the appellation “the Holy One, blessed by He” suggests (footnote 84). Like the “Our Father”, the “*Kaddish*” does not enter into the liturgical form of blessing for the “sanctification” of God. It celebrates God as creator and asks for the establishment of God’s reign and of God’s peace. The “*Kaddish*” originated in the house of study, but its use was enlarged and diversified in the daily liturgy and in the liturgy of burial. Cf. I.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and its Development*, Schocken Books, New York (1960), 1972, pp. 84-86; J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, passim; J. Heinemann, “The Background of Jesus”, *Prayer in the Jewish Liturgical Tradition*, in *The Lord’s Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, J. Petuchowski and M. Brocke (eds.), The Seabury Press, New York, 1978, pp. 81-89; Benedetto Carucci Viterbi, *Il Qaddish*, Marietti, Genova, 1991; Carmine Di Sante, *La Prière d’Israël*, Desclée-Bellarmin, Paris, 1986, pp. 175-177.

<sup>74</sup> The word “*kedushah*” should be transcribed as “*kedushsha*” in order to give the doubling of the mid consonant. We shall keep “*kedushah*” for the sake of lightness.

“Kedushot” (plural of “Kedushah”).<sup>75</sup> A certain particular prayer which is not a blessing includes a “Kedushah”; this is the “*Kedushah de-Sidra*”, which probably originated in the house of study (*beit ha-midrash*); it has been kept in the prayer which prolongs the morning office with messianic petitions.<sup>76</sup>

Israel’s liturgy attaches itself to the heavenly liturgy, to which Israel was initiated by the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel.<sup>77</sup> This is stated very simply at the beginning of the kedushah (3<sup>rd</sup> blessing in the Amidah) in the three prayers for ordinary days, evening, morning, afternoon: “We sanctify your Name in the world as it is sanctified in the highest heavens.”<sup>78</sup> The prayer for ordinary days, which is sober and brief, does not say precisely who sanctifies in the heavens, but other formulations indicate that it is Isaiah’s Seraphim (6:2) and Ezekiel’s living creatures (3:13).<sup>79</sup>

The liturgy proclaims the sanctity of the Lord (YHWH) and his glory by citing first Isaiah (6:3): “They called one to the other: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord Sabaot; his Glory fills all the earth!’” This first proclamation calls forth a question which the liturgy of Shabbat and the feasts puts into the mouth of the Seraphim: “Where is the place of his Glory?”<sup>80</sup> The answer is given by the Living Creatures, whom the liturgy places opposite the Seraphim. According to Ezekiel (3:12), they say: “Blessed is the Glory of his Place!”

The liturgy finds support for its teaching in Scripture. This is what Tradition does every time it is necessary and possible, in order to show the coherence of the Torah in points which it judges to be important. It is a matter, here, of teaching the paradox of revelation. The liturgy makes one understand that Isaiah’s proclamation and Ezekiel’s acclamation are complementary: Ezekiel’s Living Creatures make us understand that God’s Glory comes from an unknown Place.<sup>81</sup> The known Glory, which is manifested in the known Place of the Temple, comes from the unknown Place where the Holy Lord resides, over and beyond the world.

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. footnote 59.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. D. Flusser, *Sanctus und Gloria in Abraham unser Vater*, Festschrift für Otto Michel, Leiden-Köln, 1963, pp. 129-152. The “*Kedushah de-Sidra*” emphasizes a tradition which “corrects” the letter of *Isa* 6:3 by saying, in Aramaic, what is equivalent to “*pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.*” It is regrettable that the Latin liturgy, which maintained the enlargement of *Isa* 6:3, did not receive the addition from *Ezek* 3:12.

<sup>77</sup> The attachment to the heavenly liturgy is not explicit in the kedushah which is included in the 1<sup>st</sup> blessing preceding the morning Shema. As J. Heinemann confirms in a convincing way, this kedushah and its context in the blessing came forth from a milieu which was influenced by the *Merkhaba* mysticism (cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 230-233).

<sup>78</sup> In the Sephardic rite version of the “*Kedushah Rabbah*” (the “Great Kedushah”, 3<sup>rd</sup> blessing of the supplementary Amidah, about which we will speak again further on), the Shabbat liturgy proposes a more developed version: “*Keter*, ‘the crown’, the multitude of angels praise You on high, O Lord, our God, with Israel gathered together below, and all together proclaim three times your holiness...” (cf. E. Munk, *Le monde des prières, les prières du shabbat*, Keren Hasefer Ve-Halimoud, Paris, 1973, pp. 43-45, which gives a rich commentary on the “*Kedushah Rabbah*”, of which I used the translation (into French) with some modifications.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. the kedushah of the Amidah in the supplementary prayer for Shabbat and in the 1<sup>st</sup> blessing preceding the morning Shema.

<sup>80</sup> This question is made explicit in the “*Kedushah Rabbah*” of the supplementary prayer for Shabbat and the feasts.

<sup>81</sup> The Talmud (T.B. Hagigah 13b) makes this more explicit: “The minute it is said, ‘from his Place’, we deduce that this place is unknown.”

The earthly liturgy, which is associated with the heavenly liturgy and is based on it, prolongs its teaching in the elaborated formulation which it proposes on Shabbat and feast days.<sup>82</sup> The heavenly liturgy keeps its role as the origin and foundation, but the earthly liturgy becomes the main one. Israel is no longer only the people which associates itself with the sanctification by the angels; it appears as the “people which unifies the Name” by saying twice daily (*Deut* 6:4), “Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” So that from now on, one may not doubt the value of the earthly liturgy, Tradition has God say in response to the Shema Israel (*Num* 15:41; *Ex* 6:7): “I am the Lord your God.”<sup>83</sup>

This message is given in a blessing. It benefits from the guarantee given it by the blessing. This is important because of the role which liturgical sanctification has. In teaching that the two proclamations of Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12 are complementary, it teaches the paradox of revelation with authority, 3 times a day (ordinary days), 4 times on Shabbat and feast days, 5 times on the day of Kippur.

The proclamation of God’s sanctity includes the affirmation that God is the transcendent author of creation. The appellation which is used most frequently for God by oral Tradition in study and teaching is “the Holy One, blessed by He!”<sup>84</sup> It corresponds with Israel’s fundamental and paradoxical experience: the Holy God, who is Entirely Other, Separate, Transcendent, is the creator God, the source of all good, of all blessing; as we saw, He is the God who creates and forms ceaselessly, in the present, “who renews through his goodness every day, constantly, the act of the beginning.”

This paradox is taken on by Christian faith; it finds its radical expression in the “paradox of paradoxes,” which is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>85</sup> The Church received from the Synagogue the proclamation of God’s holiness, with explicit or implicit reference to Isaiah, with or without modifications.<sup>86</sup> It did not take over Ezekiel’s complement, which however is used in the liturgy mentioned in the Apostolic Constitution.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> We have to do here with the Kedushah of the supplementary Amidah for Shabbat and feasts. This Kedushah, which is more or less developed according to the feast, always ends up with *Deut* 6:4 and *Num* 15:41.

<sup>83</sup> The liturgy can vary the formulae according to the traditions it receives. In the Kedushah of the 1<sup>st</sup> blessing preceding the morning Shema, the earthly liturgy stands back before the heavenly liturgy. In the Kedushah of the Amidah for ordinary days, the earthly liturgy associates itself with the heavenly liturgy without taking away the latter’s precedence. In the Kedushah of the supplementary Amidah for Shabbat and feasts, the earthly liturgy becomes the main one. Cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 230-233; J. Heinemann – A. Shinean, *tefillot ha-qeba we-ha-hobah shel shabbat we-yom hol*, Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1976, pp. 70-73.

<sup>84</sup> The formula also appears sometimes in prayer, in Hebrew or in Aramaic, when God is mentioned in the third person, for example in the “*Kaddish*”, which we mentioned above (footnote 73). Let us finally note the resonance between this formula and the proclamation in *Isa* 45:15 of the hidden and saving God of Israel, of whom Pascal spoke so well (cf. *Pensées*, Ed. Brunschvicg, § 194, 242, 585 and J. Briand, *Le Dieu caché in Dieu dans l’Ecriture*, Cerf, Paris, 1992, pp. 91-112).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. H. de Lubac, *Paradoxes*, followed by *Nouveaux Paradoxes*, Seuil, Paris, 1959.

<sup>86</sup> The Latin liturgy uses Isaiah without citing him; it modifies him, very probably based on certain versions of the synagogue, for example the version of the Kedushah de-Sidra, while adding heaven to the earth; the Lutheran liturgy returns to the literal Isaiah and does not mention heaven.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, SC 336, Cerf, Paris, 1987, Book VII, 35, 3, p. 77. St. John Chrysostom knows the complementarity of *Isa* 6:3 and *Ezek* 3:12 (*Sur l’incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, Homily I, 3092-320, SC 28bis, Cerf, Paris, 1970, pp. 127-129). E. Peterson did not understand the message given through this complementarity, a message which remains valid and present in the Christian economy (*Le livre des anges*, Ad Solem, Genève, 1996 (1935), pp. 55-56). L. Bouyer did not understand any better what Israel’s liturgy teaches (*La vie de la liturgie*, Cerf, Paris, 1956, pp. 170-173). It is regrettable that “The Eucharistic Prayer of the Church of Jerusalem” (the Greek anaphora of Saint James of Jerusalem), André Tarby, Beauchesne, Paris, 1972, pp. 51-53, ignores the complement from *Ezek* 3:12.



The *sanctification* of God in the liturgy (kedushah) and God's sanctification through the sanctification of Israel in practicing the commandments and in accepting martyrdom are inseparable from the *blessing* about which we spoke above and from the *unification* about which we shall speak now. Thus, the liturgy, the oral Tradition which was tried and expressed by living persons and communities, is here again the support and the motor for responsible action which is brought into relationship with Scripture that is correctly used and interpreted.

### 3. Unification

As we saw, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing preceding the morning Shema, Israel asks God for the unification of the heart in love and in fear.<sup>88</sup> This is already in relationship with the conclusion of the blessing, which sums up the blessing's entire message by saying: "Blessed are you, Lord, who has chosen your (literally his) people Israel out of love."<sup>89</sup> For it is God who loves Israel first and who calls forth in Israel the desire to love him. But the question arises whether Israel will be capable of loving God. According to the usual pedagogy, the liturgy prepares the blessing's conclusion by means of a wording which is "granted" it; it proposes the following praise, which responds to the question: "You have brought us near to your great Name, Sela, in truth, so that we might give you thanks and unify you through love." God has brought Israel close to his Name; Israel is brought into contact with God through the election and will be able to respond to God's love by proclaiming God's unity with love.

"So that we might unify you through love" – the expression is surprising when we first hear it. Without doubt, the unification that is meant here is first of all simply – and one might say technically – the proclamation of the Unity in the reading which immediately follows the blessing. But there is more: the proclamation of the Unity is to "receive the yoke of God's kingship;"<sup>90</sup> it signifies the taking on of the program of unification of which the divine Unity is the founding principle.

We just saw that, in this same blessing, Israel asks of God the unification of the heart in love and fear. The anonymous old rabbinic interpretations complete the message; they teach that the proclamation of the Unity in *Deut* 6:4 calls for the unification of all of humanity; one day, as *Zachariah* (14:9) announces, all the nations will acknowledge with Israel that "the Lord is One" and that "his Name is One".<sup>91</sup>

We also saw that the "Kedushah Rabbah", the 3<sup>rd</sup> blessing in the supplementary Amidah for Shabbat and feasts, leads up to the proclamation of the Unity with *Deut* 6:4. It makes more precise that this proclamation is made out of love, twice a day, in the evening and in the morning (in the "reading of the Shema") by the "people of those who unify God's Name."

Later, this action of proclaiming the divine Unity as a principle of unification for what is not God, also tends to testify to the divine Unity considered in itself. Without doubt, people continued to speak of the divine Unity and to call it "*Ahdut*", but they also and above all

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. footnote 63.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. footnotes 50 and 51.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Mishnah Berakhot 2,2; T.B. Berakhot 61b.

<sup>91</sup> We shall return to *Zachariah* 14:9 in connection with the prayer for Rosh ha-Shanah (footnote 108), the prayer for Sukkot (footnote 112), and the prayer for Shabbat (footnote 117).

spoke of the divine Unification, which is called “*Yihud*”, as of an ineffable unfathomable reality which must nevertheless be “sought”.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, unification is an essential function of the people, and the liturgy is the place where Israel works this “unification of God”, which will give it the strength to make unification in the world.

I now want to describe the main traits by which the liturgy centers the life of Israel in several ways on unification. I will return first of all to the “reading of the Shema”. I will continue with the prayer of Rosh ha-Shanah, Kippur and Sukkot. I will end with the prayer for Shabbat.

### *The “Reading of the Shema”*

#### *The 1<sup>st</sup> Blessing before the Morning Shema Creation*

This blessing celebrates God as the transcendent creator who is over and beyond all diversity (multiplicity of the creatures) and division (good and evil, happiness and misfortune). God’s transcendence comes, paradoxically, into contact with God’s creation, which God envelops with his mercy and which God renews constantly. God is not called “Father” in this 1<sup>st</sup> blessing, perhaps because Israel does not appear in it to name God.<sup>93</sup> Here, God is the creator “who enlightens the earth and those who dwell on it with mercy.”<sup>94</sup> It is at this level of creation that the foundation for the unification of all things is established and that the blessing is justified as the main form of praise. The fact that this 1<sup>st</sup> blessing in the liturgical prayer of the morning includes a Kedushah at its center, already permits us to hear with *Ezek* 3:12 that “the Glory of the Holy God is blessed in God’s Place,” that this glory is the source of all good, of all blessing.<sup>95</sup> The entirely universal blessing does not mention Israel.

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<sup>92</sup> This development in the search for unification is also attested by the liturgical poems which appeared starting in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Italy, Spain and Germany. Thus, the poem *Yigdal Elohim*, which is attributed to Daniel ben Yehudah (Rome, around 1300) and which expresses the 13 articles of faith laid down by Maimonides in his commentary on Mishnah Sanhedrin (Chapter 10, Heleq), expresses the 2<sup>nd</sup> article: “‘One and there is no other particular (*Yahid* – individual)’ who is like his ‘Unification (*Yihudo*);’ he is hidden and there is no end to his Unity (*Ahduto*).” This poem is sung very often in the morning liturgy.

<sup>93</sup> Elsewhere, God is invoked as “merciful Father”, (2<sup>nd</sup> blessing before the morning Shema), as “Our Father who is in the Heavens”. This latter appellation appears in Mishnah Sotah 9,15; it is used by Rabbi Eliezer and is anterior to the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple. It is not frequent in prayer and does not appear in liturgical prayer. P. Billerbeck explains this rarity by the fact that one cannot make a mistake in liturgical prayer: the God to whom one is speaking as Father can only be “in the heavens” (cf. H.L. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, München, 1926, Volume I, p. 393).

<sup>94</sup> God enlightens all the inhabitants of the earth, the evil as well as the good. According to Judaism as according to Christianity (*Mt* 5:43-47), one must imitate God, the heavenly Father.

<sup>95</sup> The same message about the Creator God who is the source of peace and of life is given in a different way in the Kaddish, without a Kedushah and without the liturgical form of blessing (cf. footnote 73).

### *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Blessing before the Morning Shema Revelation (Election)*

As we have seen, this blessing requests and teaches the unification of the heart which is a consequence of and a condition for proclaiming the One God. In blessing God who chose and still chooses Israel out of love, it teaches that it is God who loved first, and it prepares for the proclamation of the divine Unity and for what immediately follows from this: “And you shall love the Lord your God...” It is God’s unifying love which underlies the central petition of the blessing: “And give our heart to discern and to understand, to hear, to learn and to teach, to observe, to do and to accomplish all the words of the Talmud of your Torah out of love!” The Talmud, the study-teaching of the Torah, is the activity by which Israel (Tradition, the oral Torah) explores all the wealth of all of the Torah, the oral Torah and the written Torah, in order to bring its legitimate plurality to the true unity which is not uniformity. It is *Talmud Torah* which allows one to perceive the coherence, the unity and the divinity of the Torah. This unification through study and teaching precedes and prepares the unification of the Talmud and of action in such a way that the unification of humanity and of the totality of the created world joins with the Unity of the One Creator God.

### *The three Paragraphs of the Reading of the Shema*

Enlightened and prepared for by means of the two blessings which precede them, the three paragraphs of the Shema Israel give the details of their teachings and their prescriptions. For these scriptural paragraphs, we have many anonymous midrashim which often precede the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple and which corroborate the teachings of the New Testament and of the Pharisaic synagogue, where the Gospel was preached originally in the context of the Jewish liturgy.

#### *The 1<sup>st</sup> Paragraph (Deut 6:4-9)*

For the beginning of the first paragraph (*Deut* 6:4-5), let us mention the admirable harmony of prayer, exegesis and action which Rabbi Akiba showed in his martyrdom in the year 135 CE. Rabbi Akiba died while praying the morning Shema, “receiving upon himself the yoke of the kingdom;” he rendered his soul while saying the word “One” (*ehad*) of the Shema (*Deut* 6:4); he thus fulfilled in his action what he had fulfilled in his exegesis when he taught: “and you shall love the Lord your God... with all your soul... even if he takes your soul.”<sup>96</sup> The oral Torah is coherent with Scripture and with itself in the liturgy, in the exegesis, in the action, in the person of Rabbi Akiba. Like Rabbi Akiba, many Jewish martyrs died “sanctifying the Name” by saying the first verse of the Shema.

#### *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph (Deut 11:13-21)*

By reading this, the Jew “receives upon himself the yoke of the commandments” by which he/she must love and serve God with all his/her heart.<sup>97</sup> This paragraph promises the reward of the commandments which culminates in the gift of many days in the Land (of Israel) promised to the Fathers. This promise is that of eternal life after death and the resurrection.<sup>98</sup> It is remarkable that Moses, speaking in the first person, appears as the one dispensing the reward (*Deut* 11:14). This makes obvious what is clearly confirmed elsewhere, that the Torah

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. T.B. Berakhot 61b.

<sup>97</sup> For “receiving the yoke of the commandments,” cf. Mishnah Berakhot 2,2.

<sup>98</sup> The resurrection promised to the Fathers, the Pharisaic hope, of which the resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the first, irreducible and irreversible fulfillment, is mentioned in the New Testament (*Acts* 13:32; 26:6); this resonates with the teaching of Rabban Gamaliel, which was taken into the Babylonian Talmud (T.B. Sanhedrin 90b).

is One, the Torah of the Lord and the Torah of Moses whom God sent.<sup>99</sup> Resurrection is the fulfillment and the definitive form of redemption; it will be the last stage in the unification of all of humanity, which from then on will be attached to the Unity of God.

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Paragraph (Num 15:37-41)*

Reading this paragraph recalls the obligation to sanctify oneself by means of the commandments, as we saw above. It ends with the mention of the exodus from Egypt and thus gives the Jew praying in the name of Israel the concrete means to remember the first redemption. The interpretations of this reading and of the obligation to remember the exodus from Egypt until “the days of the Messiah” teach the unity of God’s action in history. God does not forget, nor does God uproot the first redemption. This latter will always be remembered by God and remembered by Israel.<sup>100</sup>

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Blessing after the Reading of the Morning Shema Redemption*

The end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph opens onto the 3<sup>rd</sup> blessing, the first word of which is “*emet*” (truth). Resonating with *Jer 10:10*, this permits one to hear that God is truth.<sup>101</sup> The One God is truth; God is coherent; God’s Word and God’s action in history are true and coherent. The first redemption from Egypt is recalled to serve as a basis for the last redemption, which is requested and which will come. The liturgy remembers, in the present, the past in view of the future. This remembrance, which is based on the Truth of God and of God’s Word, is effective; it “unifies” God’s redemptive action.

We see how, through the “reading of the Shema”, Israel cooperates daily in redemption. The liturgy of the night of Passover also remembers the exodus from Egypt, the first redemption, in view of the last redemption. The structure of this remembrance is made clearly explicit in the “blessing of Redemption” which is said on the night of Passover, when the recitation of the Hallel Psalms (*Psalms 113 to 118*) is interrupted for the festive meal. For this blessing, the formula which was completed in Yavneh by Rabbi Akiba was kept; he wanted the request for the future to be based on the praise for the past.<sup>102</sup> Another example of remembrance is to be found in the central blessing of the supplementary Amidah for Shabbat. That blessing remembers the sacrifices offered in the Temple before its destruction, thus basing on the past the request for the re-establishment of these sacrifices.<sup>103</sup>

The liturgy also “unifies” the Redeemer God when it supports the repentance of the “Ten Days of Repentance”, of which we shall speak later.

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. how Scripture mentions the Torah of Moses and the Torah of the Lord side by side (*Ezra 7:6,10; Lk 2:22-24*).

<sup>100</sup> On the obligation to remember the exodus from Egypt, cf. Mishnah Berakhot 1,5; Tosephta Berakhot 1,10; T.B. Berakhot 12b-13a. It is a joy to add that the Church faithfully maintains the memory of the exodus from Egypt in its liturgy. Certain substitution theologians, who still exist today, do not live this fidelity.

<sup>101</sup> The end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph is (*Num 15:41*): “I am the Lord your God”; the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> blessing is “*emet*” (truth). One hears the prayer in the sense of saying: “The Lord your God is Truth,” in resonance with *Jer 10:10*: “The Lord God is Truth.”

<sup>102</sup> Mishnah Pesachim 10,6 shows that the present blessing was composed in Yavneh after the destruction of the Temple, with traditional elements brought in by Rabbi Tarfon for the past and by Rabbi Akiba for the future.

<sup>103</sup> The re-establishment of these sacrifices presupposes the reconstruction of the Temple and above all, of course, the return of the Shekhinah to Zion, to the Temple, as is said clearly in the blessing which is called “*Abodah* (worship)”, which immediately follows; it is the 5<sup>th</sup> blessing in the prayer for Shabbat and is identical with the 17<sup>th</sup> blessing in the prayer for ordinary days.

In addition, the liturgy teaches with coherence that “seeking the Kingdom” demands that one seek justice. The 11<sup>th</sup> blessing in the Amidah for ordinary days, which is at the beginning of the messianic petitions, ends thus: “Reign over us, You, Lord, You alone, with love and mercy. Justify us in your judgment. Blessed are You, Lord, who love justice and right.” Here again, as we pointed out for the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing preceding the morning Shema, a wording “in accord” with the conclusion precedes this: the request for the Kingdom precedes the praise of God’s justice which is borrowed from *Psalms* 33:5.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, in every way the liturgy supports human action. It is always a matter of unifying, of bringing about the Coherence, the Truth, the Unity proclaimed by the Shema Israel in its three paragraphs.

### *The Prayer for Rosh ha-Shanah*

The supplementary Amidah for this feast takes the place of the supplementary burnt offering brought in the Temple at the end of the morning by the community and for the community.<sup>105</sup> On Rosh ha-Shanah, this prayer includes 3 central blessings, “*Malkiyyot* (Kingships)”, “*Zikhronot* (Remembrances)”, “*Shofarot* (Shofars)”, which were reorganized in Yavneh after the destruction of the Temple. Each blessing praises God according to one of the three aspects which are to be emphasized at the beginning of the religious year and which are mentioned in the three parts of Scripture to which one refers in the “Necklace (*Harizah*)” procedure.<sup>106</sup>

### *The Blessing of “Kingships” (Malkiyyot)*

This blessing celebrates God, the “King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed by He!”, who is mentioned in the third person in a grandiose introduction in rhythmic prose, which was composed during the time of the second Temple: “It is our task (*Aleinu*) to praise...”<sup>107</sup> The introduction is repeated in a long prayer asking God, who from now on is mentioned in the second person, to install definitively his reign in the world. The recourse to the three parts of Scripture ends with two last verses which are particularly significant (*Zach* 14:9): “And the Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day, the Lord will be One and his Name One,” and (*Deut* 6:4): “Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” The verse from Zachariah, which is probably a historicizing re-reading of the verse from Deuteronomy, ends with this last verse in such a way that the liturgy teaches and confirms the link established by the midrash between the transcendent, supra-temporal Unity (*Deut* 6:4) and the Unity that is reached in this world at the end of history as a result of the unification which is entrusted to Israel (*Zach* 14:9).<sup>108</sup>

<sup>104</sup> It is difficult not to hear the resonance of this teaching with that of Jesus in Mt 6:33.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Num* 29:2.

<sup>106</sup> On the *Harizah*, the “necklace” that is made up of verses taken from the three parts of Scripture, cf. A. Avril – P. Lenhardt, *Trois Chemins: Emmaüs, Gaza et Damas*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 4, June 1998, pp. 16-34. The Pharisaic procedure of *Harizah*, which *Luke* knows well (24:27,44-45), manifests by means of fire the unity and the divinity of all of the Torah, Scripture and Tradition.

<sup>107</sup> Concerning the age and the composition of this prayer, which is called by its first word, “*aleinu*”, cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, pp. 271-274. An abbreviated version of this prayer serves as the final prayer after each office. In that abbreviated version, the ‘*aleinu*’ prayer ends with *Zach* 14:9. In fact, “the ‘*aleinu*’ prayer’s elevated idea which develops the future union of all human beings in the common adoration of the One God must not remain absent from daily prayer.” (E. Munk, *Le monde des prières*, Durlacher, Paris, 1958, pp. 222-223).

<sup>108</sup> Cf. the old anonymous midrash on *Deut* 6:4: “‘*The Lord our God*’, over us; ‘*the Lord is One*’ over all who come into the world. ‘*The Lord our God*’ in this world; ‘*the Lord is One*’ in the world to come,

### *The Blessing of “Remembrances” (Zikhronot)*

God, who remembers everything, remembers in particular each covenant which he made and which he will fulfill with humanity, from the covenant with Noah (*Gen* 8:1; 9:9) to the eternal covenant announced by *Ezekiel* (16:60). In the recourse to Scripture in the “Necklace” procedure, the prayer quotes *Jeremiah* (31:20, the remembrance of Ephraim) without, however, quoting the verse about the New Covenant (31:31), because this verse does not include the key word, “remembrance” or “memory”. In any case, it is clear that the blessing praises God for all the covenants in history; so the New Covenant of *Jeremiah*, about which the Letter to the Hebrews speaks and which is fulfilled in the New Testament, cannot be excluded from the covenants. In reality, there is only one unique covenant which is realized in several stages. The blessing’s conclusion formally teaches this when it says: “Blessed are You, Lord, who remember the covenant.”<sup>109</sup> Going by the official declarations of the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council which resonate with those of the other important Christian Churches, this teaching which is given through Israel’s liturgy has also become the common teaching of the Church. The One and unique covenant of the One and unique God shows itself to be New and already Eternal in Jesus Christ, who in himself unites humanity with the divinity.<sup>110</sup>

### *The Blessing of the “Shofars” (Shofarot)*

The blowing of the Shofar, a characteristic rite of Rosh ha-Shanah, is done in resonance with the voice of the shofar by which God manifests himself in history in many ways which are indicated in the “Necklace” of Scripture citations. It is the same God, One and unifying, who manifests himself in the diversity of time through the same voice of the shofar. The blessing points towards the end of time, when God himself will blow the shofar (*Zach* 9:14) in order to gather together the exiles of Israel for the final redemption.

### *The Kippur Prayer*

Kippur is the end of the “10 days of repentance”, which bring Israel, who was separated from God through sin, back to God (*Isa* 59:2). The repentance is intensely marked by the detailed confessions which are repeated at each of the five offices of the feast. In the introduction to each of these confessions, Israel confesses its faults in solidarity with the entire people of the present and with the past generations. This is an affirmation of the unity of the people in their responsibility for the faults, of which they must assume the consequences. This responsibility is expressed in the following words: “Our God and God of our Fathers! May our prayer come to you! Do not turn away from our supplication! For we are neither insolent nor hardened so that we would say before you, Lord our God and God of our Fathers, that we are just and that we have not sinned. For in truth, we and our Fathers have sinned.”<sup>111</sup> Such a

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and this is what Scripture says (*Zach* 14:9): ‘*And the Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day, the Lord will be One and his Name One.*’” (Sifre on *Deut* 6:4, p. 54).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. P. Lenhardt, *Le renouvellement (hiddush) de l’alliance dans le judaïsme rabbinique*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 3, December 1997, pp. 126-175.

<sup>110</sup> It is good that there are several versions of the words for the institution of the Eucharist in oral Tradition. In reference to *Ex* 24:8, *Matthew* (26:28) and *Mark* (14:24) transmit: “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant,” whereas Luke heard (22:20): “This cup is the new covenant in my blood,” and the Latin liturgy received: “This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.” The diversity of the testimonies converges towards unity: the covenant is new and eternal. The Latin liturgy, which is an expression of the Church’s oral Tradition, shows the coherence of the Word of God.

<sup>111</sup> This prayer is full of scriptural resonances, according to which Israel confesses its sin and the sin of the Fathers (cf. *Lev* 26:40; *Jer* 3:25; 14:20; 17:23; *Isa* 65:7; *Ps* 106:6; *Neh* 9:2,16-17,34; cf also the

confession and such repentance are the condition for the redemption in which Israel must cooperate for itself and for the entire world.<sup>112</sup> The liturgy ends in a grandiose way with the proclamation of the Shema Israel (*Deut* 6:4): “Hear, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is One,” which is followed by the age-old acclamation from the Temple liturgy, repeated three times: “Blessed be the Name of God’s Kingship of Glory for ever and ever!” and the ancient proclamation of the people on Mount Carmel (*1 Kings* 18:39), repeated seven times: “It is the Lord who is God!” The entire liturgy ends with the blowing of the shofar, which announces the coming of redemption which is made possible by the repentance achieved on Kippur. This announcement prepares the celebration of redemption, which is done in anticipation during the liturgy of the feast of Sukkot.

### *The Sukkot Prayer*

The festival of Sukkot, the third pilgrimage festival, includes a superabundance of rites and brings the joy of the pilgrimages to its climax. By Tradition, it is called simply “the Festival”, that is to say, the Festival *par excellence*, and it is mentioned in the liturgy as “the time of our joy.” This obviously does not mean to say that Sukkot is superior to Passover or to Pentecost. However, it does signify that Sukkot is close to the redemption which was inaugurated through Passover and towards which Israel goes in the correct way since the gift of the Torah at Pentecost. The exuberant joy of Sukkot is that of the anticipated celebration of the final redemption. This redemption is described by Zachariah (chapter 14), which makes up the prophetic reading that was established for the first day of the Festival. This reading includes the verse which we have already encountered several times (14:9): “Then the Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day, the Lord will be One and his Name One.”<sup>113</sup> The festival of Sukkot which the prophet describes will be celebrated by all the nations, who will be united through the worship rendered to the “One” God (14:9), to the “King, the Lord Sabaot” (14:16-17), “*in the house of the Lord Sabaot*” (14:21). However, the unification which is announced in joy still remains to be reached in the future. As we shall see, the Shabbat liturgy dares to affirm that the unification has already been reached in the experience of the lived Shabbat.

### *The Shabbat Prayer*

Shabbat reaches from the creation of the world to the resurrection of the dead.<sup>114</sup> It is divine life communicated and entrusted to Israel in order to unify the entire diversity of the created world and to bring it back to the One God. The Shabbat liturgy develops according to the

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resonance of “in truth – *aval*... we have sinned” with “in truth – *aval*, we expiate...” in *Gen* 42:21). Concerning the solidarity and unity of Israel which does away with the separation from God, cf. the beautiful homily by Rabbi Jehudah Arie Leib Alter of Ger (1847-1905) for the day of Kippur in the year 1891 on Mishnah Yoma 8,9 and *Isa* 59:2, in *Sefat Emet* 5, 151-152. The Mishnah teaches: “For the faults committed by the human person towards the Place (God), the day of Kippur expiates; for the faults committed by the human person towards his/her neighbor, the day of Kippur only expiates if he/she first obtained reconciliation from his/her neighbor.” The “Sefat Emet” recalls *Isa* 59:2: “It is your faults which set up the separation among yourselves and from your God”, and explains: Two separations have to be repaired; the first is *among yourselves*, the second is *from your God*. Reconciliation with one’s neighbor does away with the first separation in such a way that the day of Kippur unifies all human beings and does away with the separation from God.

<sup>112</sup> According to the two great Pharisaic masters at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, if Israel does not repent, there will be no redemption. Rabbi Yehoshua, however, thinks that the Holy One, blessed by He!, will be able to intervene so that Israel will repent (cf. T.B. Sanhedrin 97b).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. footnotes 91,108, 117.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on *Ex* 31:16, p. 343.

pedagogy which we saw above concerning the Shema: Creation (in the evening prayer), Revelation (and election, in the morning prayer), Redemption (in the afternoon prayer). These stages already let one experience the coherence and unity of the divine plan which was revealed to Israel. But here there is more: the unification which was entrusted to Israel is mentioned explicitly in the liturgy, in the “Kedushah Rabbah” of the supplementary Amidah, which we already saw from various points of view, and in the central blessing of the afternoon Amidah.

### *The “Kedushah Rabbah”*

As we have seen, this blessing causes the heavenly liturgy to come down to earth, where Israel proclaims God’s Unity. From God’s unknown place, God makes his glory known to the angels and to human beings, but to Israel, which is called the “people of those who unify your Name”, the proclamation of God’s Unity is reserved. This ineffable Unity makes itself known as the Unity of mercy and of justice, whereby the mercy precedes ontologically the justice and envelops it.<sup>115</sup> This mercy, which is signified by God’s ineffable Name, YHWH, proceeds from the unknown place, as the blessing immediately after the acclamation of Ezekiel’s living creatures (3:12) teaches: “‘Blessed be the Glory of the Lord (YHWH) from his place!’ May God turn from his place with mercy and may God be gracious to the people of those who unify his Name in the evening and in the morning, constantly all the days, saying twice out of love, ‘Shema’: ‘Hear (shema) Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!’” Thus, mercy is the first word of the Lord God, who makes himself known from his unknown place. Justice, which is signified by the common name of God (*Elohim, Eloheinu* = Our God), appears in what follows in the text, but it is surrounded by mercy, as indicated through the name of “Father” and mentioned explicitly at the end of the passage: “He is our God (*Eloheinu*), he is our Father, he is our King, he is our Lord and he will cause to be heard a second time (twice) with mercy, in the presence of every living creature (what was said to Israel in the desert and written in *Num* 15:41): ‘so as to be your God, I am the Lord your God.’” The Shema Israel, which is said by Israel and accepted by God within the framework of a liturgical blessing and sanctification (Kedushah), realizes unification by proclaiming the perfect Unity of the Lord (mercy) – God (justice).

### *The Central Blessing of the Afternoon Amidah*

The community prayer in the afternoon, the last prayer of Shabbat, has the theme of redemption in its central blessing. Because of the pedagogical structure which has already been mentioned several times, this is without doubt, although the word “redemption” does not appear in the prayer. In addition, it is obvious that the blessing describes a reality which is that of Shabbat in the world to come, after the resurrection of the dead.<sup>116</sup> The beginning of the blessing already says the essential: “You are One and your Name is One (*Zach* 14:9; *Deut* 6:4), and who is like your people (‘am) Israel, One people (goy) on the earth (*2 Sam* 7:23).” “You are One and your Name is One.” The expression is borrowed from *Zachariah* (14:9) and put into the 2<sup>nd</sup> person and the present tense.<sup>117</sup> *Zachariah* (14:9), a historicizing re-reading of *Deuteronomy* (6:4), is in the future tense. The reality of Shabbat puts it into the present. Everything is already One: God, his Name and Israel. In practicing the

<sup>115</sup> Cf. P. Lenhardt, *La miséricorde dans la tradition d’Israël*, in *La vie spirituelle*, March-April 1992, Year 72, no. 699, volume 146, pp. 149-167.

<sup>116</sup> On God’s side, Shabbat, the divine life entrusted to Israel, is in creation and in the resurrection, beyond all the other manifestations of redemption. Cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, p. 33 and his interpretation of the reality described in the blessing.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. footnotes 91, 108, 112.



commandments of Shabbat and in the liturgy, Israel is already in contact with the unified reality of Shabbat in the world to come. What the rabbinic interpretations teach in many ways based on Scripture, is taught and confirmed here with the greatest authority through the liturgy. This latter does not quote Scripture, but it transposes it so as to bring out in the best possible resonance what is awaiting Israel: God's rest and peace in Unity.<sup>118</sup> The nations are not mentioned, but it goes without saying that they are not excluded from the "world which will be entirely Shabbat."<sup>119</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Israel's liturgical prayer, an oral Word entrusted to living persons and communities, teaches faith and hope in full coherence with Scripture, but without necessarily basing itself on it. Liturgical prayer is the fundamental action in which the people lives its relationship with God. It is the activity which enlightens and supports all the other activities of the people, whether these be explicitly prescribed by the Torah or not. The liturgy "blesses" the Creator God, the source of all that is good; it "sanctifies" the unknown God who wants to make himself known out of love; it "unifies" the One God who, out of love, wants the unification of humanity and unification with humanity.

Through its oral character, Jewish liturgy supports what is at the heart of the preached Gospel: blessing, life, the Resurrection; it lets one experience the paradox of the revelation which is radicalized in the Incarnation; it contributes to redemption and nourishes the search for the Unity of which the Jewish observance of Shabbat and the Christian Eucharist are the sacrament.

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<sup>118</sup> Is it possible to say that through the Shabbat, Israel is One with God? The liturgy suggests this but does not say it. Rather than speaking of unity with God, it is preferable to speak of communion. Cf. G. Scholem, *Les grands courants de la mystique juive*, Payot, Paris, 1973, pp. 16-19; *Les origines de la Kabbale*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1966, pp. 319-320. Certain Hassidic masters however, speak of union (*abdut*) in the context of Shabbat, for example Rabbi Meshullam Leib Feibush of Zbarah (d. 1795), *Divrei Yosher Emet* 46.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* on *Ex* 31:13, p. 341; *Mishnah Tamid* 7,4; *Abot de-Rabbi Nathan A*, Chapter 1,3a.