

The Importance of Jewish Sources for a Christian

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Introductory Remarks¹

The Jewish sources with which I have been working now for many years are of vital importance for me as a Christian. Of course, I would like all Christians to recognize their importance and that more and more Christians become involved in the study of Jewish sources. Since I cannot claim any doctoral fame, my comments will be based only on the experience I have acquired through my contact with Israel and its religious Tradition. My personal position is that of a Catholic. That should not be understood in opposition to other Christian denominations. Rather, I want to be as clear as possible about my own identity in order to speak of the importance of Jewish studies for me.

I want to say that the Jewish sources which I as a Catholic take into consideration are those which serve as a reference for “all Jews”, to borrow a phrase from Mark’s Gospel (7:13) which seems relevant. In fact, I believe that when the Catholic Church speaks of “Jews” and of “Judaism” in remembering the patrimony common to Judaism and to Christianity, in speaking of Jewish and of Christian identity, in affirming that ‘the First Covenant was never revoked’, it means and can only mean, first of all, those Jews and that Judaism which are in continuity with the Pharisees.² Certainly, in signing a fundamental agreement with the State of Israel in December 1993, the Catholic Church acknowledges that this State represents the Jewish people and consequently other Jews besides those who claim to be in continuity with the Pharisees. Nevertheless, it is this continuity which for the State of Israel constitutes the only point of reference common to all Jews: ‘religious’ Jews, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Liberal, ‘non-religious’ Jews, secular, agnostic, atheist, anti-religious. Neither the writings of Spinoza nor those of Marx or Freud or of yet others whom each individual might appreciate according to his or her language,

¹ These lines reorganize and complete my article, *Israel’s Tradition and the New Testament*, bib (bulletin d’information biblique) no. 46, Paris, June 1996, pp. 11-15. They are also a modified version of the text of a conference given recently to a group of Christians gathered in Jerusalem for a week of study that was organized by the SIDIC of Rome. The title of that conference was: *The Importance of Jewish Sources for Christians*. I am modifying this title which now becomes: *The Importance of Jewish Sources for a Christian*. By that change, I want to express my intention of stating freely some of my personal convictions. Some Christian friends have asked me to do this in view of publishing this article in *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, no. 7, December 1999. In agreeing to this request, I will supplement the personal character of what I have written by mentioning some publications in which I developed in detail the points which I think it is important to mention again here in a summarized way. I hope that the result will be greater coherence for the whole.

² I do not believe it necessary here to quote or even to mention in detail the documents of the Catholic Church which, from the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1965), to the Pope’s most recent speeches during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in March 2000, define and guide his attitude concerning Jews and Judaism. Further on, in the context of what is needed for my presentation, I will quote some phrases from these documents.

culture and literary tastes, are for me Jewish sources. For me, the Jewish sources are above all those which the Pharisaic masters and their successors recognize as Word of God, as Torah. The words the prophet Isaiah heard (2:3) back me up: “*For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*” Certainly, according to the prophet, it is at the end of time that the nations will say this. But for me as a Christian, this end of time has begun with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, I can say with him and with my Christian brothers and sisters from among the Gentiles and with the Jews who have or have not become Christians that ‘Torah comes out of Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem’. Through my baptism, I belong to a Church which says with Jesus Christ and in reference to the prophet Isaiah whom I just quoted: “*We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.*” In saying that, I am not bringing in a separation between the Word of the Lord, the Torah which comes out of Zion, that is to say, from the Jews according to Isa 51:16, and **Jesus Christ** who, **in his Person** is, for me, the Torah. Nor do I separate the salvation which comes from the Jews from the salvation which, for me, comes from God through Jesus Christ, the Messiah who is ‘the shoot of David’.³

I just said that **Jesus Christ in his Person is the Torah**. This is for me the whole reality, the reality towards which my whole presentation is pointing, and I will try to render an account of this at the end of the article.

For me, the Jewish sources are the oral and written Torah of the Pharisees as it has been received and transmitted by the Jews of today, as I receive it from them within my faith in Jesus Christ. To be more exact, my faith in Jesus Christ has been enlightened by what has clearly become or become again the common teaching of the Catholic Church on ‘the First Covenant which has never been revoked’.⁴ This common teaching in the Church excludes both the ‘teaching of contempt’, of which Jules Isaac spoke so well, and the ‘theology of substitution’ which continues to this day among certain Christian theologians and exegetes and against which we still have to fight. Thus, I believe that the one Covenant has become ‘New and Eternal’ in Jesus Christ, and that it in no way abolishes the Old Covenant, the Covenant of Sinai, which is lived by the Jews in its two dimensions of ‘Torah and commandment (Ex 24:12)’.⁵

³ I am referring here to the 15th benediction of the Amidah (community prayer) for ordinary days, which is an amalgam of Zach 3:8, Isa 11:1 and Jer 33:15. This benediction, which links the salvation of God with the ‘shoot of David’, could be of Judeo-Christian origin. Cf. Y. Liebes, ‘*Who Makes the Horn of Jesus to Flourish*’, Immanuel no. 21, Summer 1987, Jerusalem, pp. 55-67. I will come back to this later in connection with messianism. Cf. footnote 26.

⁴ I am referring to a phrase used by Pope John Paul II in an address to the Jewish communities of Germany (Mainz, November 17, 1980). This phrase was quoted in the Notes of the Roman Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism (June 24, 1985). It was examined at length in a penetrating article by M.R. Macina, *Caducité ou irrévocabilité de la première Alliance dans le Nouveau Testament? A propos de la “formule de Mayence”*, Istina XLI (1996), pp. 347-399. Here, I want to quote the words of a German Lutheran exegete and theologian concerning the election of Israel as established in the Old Testament: ‘A single fundamental proposal must be made theologically conscious and put into practice: the certainty that God maintains the choice of Israel and His partiality for His people, even when this people says no to Jesus Christ, is part of the Christian faith. This certainty thus belongs both to the Christian creed and to the catechism.’ Cf. P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Katechismus und Siddur*, Selbstverlag Institut Kirche und Judentum, Berlin, 1994, p. 18.

⁵ Cf. my article, *Le renouvellement (hiddush) de l’alliance dans le judaïsme rabbinique*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 3, 1997, pp. 126-176. The Jewish liturgy (Additional Prayer for Rosh haShanah) teaches that “God remembers the covenant”, the unique covenant which is accomplished in several stages from the covenant with Noah (Gen 8:1; 9:9) to the eternal covenant announced by Ezekiel

The Old Covenant, the Torah and the commandments of Judaism remain valid for the Jews, and they enlighten the faith, the hope and the practice of Christians within the New Covenant.

The vital Importance of Jewish Sources

The Jewish sources are the oral and the written Torah, as I already said, or in other words, the One Torah, oral and written, “the Torah of Moses that the Lord the God of Israel gave”. (Ezra 7:6)⁶ These sources are of vital importance to me, the importance of life itself. I would like to be able to say in truth that frequenting the Jewish sources, occupying myself with the Torah which the Jews teach me: ‘This (hu) is my life’ (cf. Deut 30:20). I receive what Rabbi Akiba lived and taught before dying in Caesarea, tortured by the Romans, in the year 135 C.E.⁷ I would like to be able to say as he did that the Torah received from God through the Jews has really become for me ‘vitality’ (hiyyut), the ‘vital milieu’, the ‘vital element’ of my existence, as water is the vital element for fish.⁸ From another master, I also hear that being busy with the Torah, living of the ‘vitality’ of Israel is to live of God Himself. This is what Rav Dov Baer of Lubavich (1773-1827) teaches.⁹ According to him, it is God Himself who is called by the pronoun ‘Hu = He’ in Deut 30:20: “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and attaching yourself to him; for He (hu) is your life and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”¹⁰ Thus, in a marvelous continuity which goes across the centuries, a hassidic master takes to its logical conclusion what Rabbi Akiba lived and wanted to say when he died while saying the word ‘Ehad = One’ of the Shema Israel Prayer: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!”¹¹ Plunged in the life which is the Torah, Rabbi Akiba was fully ‘attached’ to God (cf. Deut 30:20). He attained ‘devekut-adhesion (attachment) to God, for which we can also use the word ‘communion’ or perhaps even the word ‘union’.¹² A Christian must hear the teaching of Rabbi Akiba

(16:60). This covenant became for Christians the new covenant announced by Jeremiah (31:31). It is what Jesus says according to the Gospel of Luke (22:20) and the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (11:25). In the Eucharistic prayer of the Latin liturgy, the Tradition of the Church gives a more complete version of the words of Jesus: “This is my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant”. This version unites the announcement made by Jeremiah (31:31) and by Ezekiel (16:60); it manifests the coherence of the one Tradition of Israel and of the Church as taught by the liturgy. For the two dimensions, Torah and commandment(s), cf. Ex 24:12; Deut 30:11-20; 2 Kings 17-34; 2 Chr 14:3; Neh 9:14 and Mishnah Makkot 3,16, quoted further down (cf. footnote 58).

⁶ Scripture deliberately mentions side by side the ‘Torah of Moses’ and the ‘Torah of the Lord’ (Ezra 7:6.10; Neh 8:1.8). Luke makes this thinking his own (Lk 2:22,24).

⁷ T.B. (Babylonian Talmud) Berakhot 61b.

⁸ Ibid. In a marvelous fable of which a fox and fish are the main characters, Rabbi Akiba teaches that water is ‘vitality’ (hiyyut) for fish as the Torah is for Israel.

⁹ This teacher was the son and successor of Rabbi Shneur Zalman (1747-1813), founder of the HaBaD Hassidim.

¹⁰ *Quntres ha-Hitpa’alut* 5a translated into English by Louis Jacobs, Tract on Ecstasy, Vallentine, Mitchell, London, 1963, pp. 62-63.

¹¹ T.B. Berakhot 61b.

¹² Perhaps we should prudently prefer the word ‘communion’. Cf. G. Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1941, pp. 4-7; *Les origines de la Kabbale*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1966, pp. 319-320. Certain hassidic masters do, however, speak of ‘union’ (ahdut), for example Rabbi Meshullam Leib Feibush of Zbarah (d. 1795), *Divrei Yosher Emet* 46.

and of Rabbi Dov Baer resonating in the words of Jesus in the Gospel according to John (14:6; 17:3): *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life... And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*¹³

The life which is Torah did not free Rabbi Akiba or Jesus before him from knowing the extremes of human suffering, from experiencing absolute abandonment, from undergoing torture and death. All the positive things which the Christian receives from the Jews, if he or she wishes to do so, cannot dispense him or her from living with them the horror of innocent suffering, as also the horror of specific, unspeakable Jewish suffering which has no other possible name except Shoah (catastrophe). For a Christian, to hear universal suffering, innocent suffering, Jewish suffering, is part of hearing the Torah and must be at the foundation of a renewed Christology which takes into account the Shoah.

For all that, we cannot ignore the 'joy of the Torah (simhah shel Torah)', the joy which Jews experience in studying-teaching (talmud) Torah, in the observance of the commandments.¹⁴ This joy is Israel's joy. Its specificity is inalienable. Sown in light for the righteous and for those who 'put their heart right' in repentance, it cannot be uprooted and cannot leave the last word to suffering.¹⁵ 'Joy of the Torah' is the specific joy of Israel. It is a fact that it is possible for a Gentile to experience it through contact with Jews. For a Christian, such an experience is inseparable from the joy received at baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:48-52), the joy of Jesus Christ, the perfect joy of the one in whom he dwells (Jn 15:11).¹⁶ This is the joy which 'perfect Torah (Torah temimah, Ps 19:8)' gives when one perceives the coherence which comes forth from its Unity.¹⁷

¹³ Cf. the blessing after the reading of the Torah and in the Kedushah de-Sidra. Cf. also Jn 5:39; 6:67; 11,25-26. For a Christian, Jesus has the words of eternal life, he is the Word, the Truth, the Life. For a Jew who has not received the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, these words of Jesus and about Jesus can be considered blasphemous. For a Christian, they illuminate from within the divinity of the oral and written Torah of which Israel lives.

¹⁴ Cf. S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Schocken Books, New York, 1961, Chapter XI, The Joy of the Law, pp. 148-169. If I be permitted to say, it seems to me that from the Jewish point of view, one cannot stop at the suffering and deny the joy. The Psalm (34:15) teaches that one must know, remember and denounce evil so that it no longer be done; it also teaches that one must do good, that one must believe that good will have the last word and that it will bring happiness and joy. The structure of servitude-liberation, mourning-joy, happiness-unhappiness is that of a basic experience which is common to Judaism and to Christianity. For Jews, it culminates in the mourning of Tisha b'Av (9th of the month of Av, the day of the destruction of the 1st and of the 2nd Temple), which prepares one for the joy of Jerusalem rebuilt (Isa 66:10). For Christians, who with the Jews and with Jesus must weep over the destruction of the Temple, this structure culminates in the death of Jesus Christ which leads to his resurrection. It seems to me to be impossible to think that the Shoah abolishes this structure. Without doubt, the Shoah drastically changes the way in which Jews can live it from now on. And it obliges Christians to do an in-depth revision on their way of living repentance (teshuvah), remembering that from the beginning, it is inseparable from the preaching of the Gospel (Mk 1:15; Lk 24:47).

¹⁵ This is the message of Yom Kippur, when the liturgy begins with Psalm 97:11: *"A light is sown for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart."*

¹⁶ I will come back to this later and say that Jesus Christ is the divine Presence (Shekhinah) in the world and in the heart of believers. The Holy Spirit, the Shekhinah, and joy are inseparable.

¹⁷ Jesus Christ, who for Christians is the Shekhinah *par excellence*, does not take anything away from the other manifestations of the Shekhinah in the world. Each of these manifestations reveals the same God who is One and Unique. The joy of Jesus Christ, which is a joy in fullness for Christians, does not mean as a consequence that the joy of the Torah is less for Jews. I will come back to this later, but already here I want to say that the joy of Jesus Christ, who is in his Person the Torah, is the joy of the

The One Torah from the One God

Since the Old Covenant was never revoked, I receive in the Unique Covenant which is already New and Everlasting in Jesus Christ, the One Torah which comes to me from the One God through the Jews. This One Torah is diverse. According to Jewish Tradition, I differentiate in it between the oral Tradition of Judaism (Mishnah), Scripture (Mikrah), Talmud (Midrash), Halakhah and Haggadah.¹⁸ As a Christian, according to the Tradition of my Church, I situate within this marvelous Unity of the Word of God the collection, now written in its entirety, of oral and written testimonies about Jesus Christ. To the New Testament, which has now become Scripture, I add all that in the Church's Tradition lets me know Jesus Christ. I know and I believe that He is the Word of God become flesh, the 'abridged Word' which recapitulates and unifies all the words of the Torah of the One God.¹⁹ In frequenting Jewish sources, I can only come from Him and I can only go to Him.

The To and Fro from Christianity to Judaism and from Judaism to Christianity²⁰

My point of departure is necessarily Christianity. It would be more than stupid to study Jewish sources while leaving my Christian faith aside. It would be an error and one that would be all the more serious because I would believe that thus I was studying Judaism in a neutral and scientific way. In reality, no scientific study can be done without an hypothesis. The question is to choose a good hypothesis, preferably the best hypothesis. My hypothesis is that Christian faith is coherent with the Word of God, which comes to me from the Jewish sources, as it comes to me from specifically Christian sources.

In order to explore the riches of my Christian faith, I start with this faith and in particular with the words which today are written in the New Testament and which I read in faith. I know that in Jesus Christ, in the One God, my faith and the New Testament are linked with Judaism and its sources. Thus, I search in those sources for what will let me get to know God and myself better. This process which goes from Christianity to Judaism could be called 'analytical'.

There is another process which goes from Judaism to Christianity, which I would call 'synthetic', for lack of a better term.²¹ This process, inseparable from the first one, happens in the encounter with Jews and in listening to Judaism as they define themselves and express themselves. The Church invites us to this kind of listening

Torah *par excellence*, one with the joy of the Torah known by Jews, joy illuminating joy, joy illumined by joy.

¹⁸ Sifre on Deut 32:2, p. 339.

¹⁹ Cf. H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1961, Second Part, I, pp. 181-197; *L'Écriture dans la Tradition*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1966, pp. 232-246.

²⁰ Cf. my article *Évangile et Tradition d'Israël...* I am coming back to it here and both completing it and making it more clear.

²¹ I would like to find better adjectives than 'analytical' and 'synthetic' for both of those two distinct processes.

which must respect the Jews as they are and as they wish to remain.²² In this process, I obviously cannot leave aside my Christian faith, but I must avoid limiting my listening to that which in Judaism already resonates with my faith. Judaism cannot be reduced to what my Christian faith as such prepares me to receive from it.²³ Since it is other and larger than my Christian expectation, if I listen to Judaism in what it says about itself, about God, about humanity and the world, it will shed light on aspects of my faith which are unknown and unexpected. They are part of the patrimony common to Judaism and to Christianity, but as yet they are not sufficiently known. In this process, I listen to Jews, I study with them and enter their school. I believe that I perceive something of what they call the ‘joy of the Torah’, which I already mentioned. I try to understand what the Torah is for them and how they live of it. I share their prayer when they invite me to do so. I pray with them, with the words of their prayer, knowing that I am not praying their prayer in their place, but I experience that their prayer, in what it says, resonates in me according to my Christian faith. For example, the shout of joy, ‘Hallelu-Yah’, means for both Jews and for me: “*Hallelu-Yah!* (Praise Him whose name is Yah! Ps 113:1). *Praise, you servants of the Lord, and no longer slaves of Pharaoh!*”²⁴ When I come into contact with the Jewish pascal joy of the ‘Hallelu-Yah!’, I cannot avoid experiencing the Christian pascal joy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is how the Jewish sources illumine most profoundly my Christian faith. Listening to Jews as they define themselves often lets me discover what was latent or hidden and at times even covered over in my Christian life.

The ‘synthetic’ process does not necessarily and automatically lead to recognizing a Christian resonance. This means that as a Christian I remain obliged to study the Jewish sources as they are, without seeing in them a relationship to the Christian faith. This obliges me to accept that the Jews who live from these sources and who are their legitimate and competent interpreters and users do not believe in Jesus Christ. This also and in any case brings me to recognize that Jesus Christ and Christianity are larger than what Christians have said about them until now. When, however, something does resonate, my Christian life receives a joyous confirmation which comes more from evidence perceived than from any proof.

Shoulder to shoulder with other Christians, Sisters and Brothers of Our Lady of Sion, colleagues teaching at the Centre Saint Pierre de Sion (Ratisbonne), I have for a long time and intensively put into practice this to and fro of which I have spoken. In doing so, I have been involved in assessing the patrimony common to Jews and to

²² Here, I remind the reader of the recommendations given by the Catholic Church in the *Guidelines and Suggestions* of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism (December 1, 1974); these were mentioned again in the same commission’s *Notes* (June 24, 1985), in the Preliminary Considerations no. 3 and 4.

²³ In my thesis for obtaining a Master’s Degree in theology (Canonical Master’s Degree), I pointed out what seems to me to be erroneous in the way H. Urs von Balthasar makes use of the idea of ‘christological structure of Israel’ in order to speak of certain aspects of Judaism. There is a risk of projecting onto Judaism structures which are only very imperfectly christological, not to say in certain cases falsely christological, in the measure in which the faith of Christians has not yet come to a total comprehension of the Christ revelation. This is why H. Urs von Balthasar wrongly judged Zionism. Cf. *Einsame Zwiesprache*, Jakob Hegner, Köln/Olten, 1958, pp. 113-114. Cf. my thesis, *Conditions de légitimité d’un témoignage chrétien auprès des juifs*, Institut Catholique of Paris, April-May 1970, p. 81 and footnote 137. Cf. the German edition of this same thesis: *Auftrag und Unmöglichkeit eines legitimen christlichen Zeugnisses gegenüber den Juden*, Selbstverlag Institut Kirche und Judentum, Berlin, 1980, pp. 104-105, footnote 137.

²⁴ T. J. (Jerusalem Talmud) Pesahim 5,5, 32c.

Christians, as the Catholic Church has asked us to do.²⁵ In the following, I will briefly give some examples so as to give some idea of the wealth of this patrimony and of the importance of the Jewish sources and to sketch some of the contours of all this. Many other examples could be given if this article could be extended.

I want to state clearly that I will not speak about the Jewish and Christian belief in a personal Messiah. Certainly, this belief is fundamental for a Christian, since he or she believes in Jesus Christ, that is to say in Jesus-the-Messiah. Messiah for Jews and for Gentiles. But due to the great variety of Jewish opinions on the Messiah and on messianism, it is not certain that this belief is part of our common patrimony. Without doubt, there are profound resonances between the messianism and the eschatology taught in the Jewish liturgy and what the Church says about Jesus Christ (Messiah) in its prayer and theology.²⁶ But a fundamental divergence prevents a to and fro between Judaism and Christianity on the question of Jesus-the-Messiah because of different positions concerning the resurrection. For the Jews, who do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus, the Jesus of the Christians who died on the cross cannot be the Messiah. For the Christians, the risen Jesus Christ can be the Messiah because he conquered death, and he is the Messiah in spite of the delay in the messianic realizations which are expected of him. Thus, this difference between Jews and Christians does not allow us to speak of a common patrimony on the question of the Messiah.

The Oral Torah and the Resurrection²⁷

²⁵ Notes of the commission..., Preliminary Considerations nos. 1 and 3.

²⁶ Cf. my article, *L'eschatologie dans la liturgie d'Israël*, La Maison-Dieu, 220, 1999/4, pp. 119-146. Here I will only point out the teaching given in the 15th benediction of the community prayer which I already mentioned in footnote 3. This benediction ends with the words: "Blessed are you, Lord, who causes the horn of salvation to grow." This unusual phrase cannot be found anywhere else except in the Gospel of Luke (1:69). Other indications point towards a Jewish-Christian origin. As it stands, the benediction corresponds well with the situation of Christians who certainly already have the real beginning of salvation in Jesus Christ, but who ask that the strength (the horn) of that salvation grow. An analogous request is made by the Church for the Jews in the Good Friday prayer: "Lead the people of the First Covenant to the fullness of redemption." The Church, like Israel, remains in the 'not yet', even though it has already truly entered into the 'already'. That 15th benediction could be Christian. The other 'messianic' benedictions in the community prayer, which are certainly less close to Christianity, contain nothing that is incompatible with Christian faith, and they have a meaning which, by way of Israel's faith, supports Christian faith. Every Christian, whether or not he or she is of Jewish origin, must value the requests of Israel's liturgy. This is due to the coherence of the One and unique Torah.

²⁷ Cf. P. Lenhardt - M. Collin, *La Torah orale des pharisiens*, Supplément au Cahier Evangile 73, Cerf, Paris, 1990, pp. 35-42. Cf. also P. Lenhardt, *A l'origine du mouvement pharisien, la Tradition orale et la Résurrection*, in *Le Judaïsme à l'aube de l'ère chrétienne*, XVIIIème Congrès de l'ACFEB, Lyon, September 1999, *Lectio Divina* 186, Cerf, Paris, 2001, pp. 123-176. It seems necessary to insist on the value of Tradition as oral Torah in Judaism and in Christianity. Without wanting to decide on such a delicate topic of discussion between Protestants and Catholics as are the relations between Tradition and Scripture, the Catholic Church does state that "the Christian faith is not 'a religion of the Book'. Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, "not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living (St. Bernard, hom. Miss. 4, 11)". Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 108) and H. de Lubac, *L'Écriture dans la Tradition*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1966, p. 246, from which the Catechism took the phrase. Judaism and Christianity are 'religions of listening' as opposed to Islam, which is a 'religion of the book'. I tried to say this clearly in my article, *L'Unità di Dio – Le religioni dell'ascolto I-II*, *Qol* 77/78, Reggio, 1998, pp. 2-9; *Qol* 79, 1999, pp. 2-9.

Starting from my Christian faith, I see that the first Gospel we received, transmitted by Saint Paul, proclaims orally the resurrection of Christ on the 3rd day, according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15). This proclamation is based on a Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead. I also know from the New Testament that it is the Pharisees who believe in the resurrection, whereas the Sadducees deny it (Acts 23:6-8). In order to better understand what this is about, I go back analytically to the Jewish sources, and I see that the Pharisees teach about the resurrection of the dead in two ways. In prayer, they teach it without recourse to Scripture, but in Midrash and Talmud they base their teaching on Scripture or on what they see in nature. This pedagogy proceeds from the value they give to the oral tradition of their people. From that tradition, they receive the belief in the resurrection of the dead, and they consider that tradition to be the Word of God, of Torah, with the same authority as that of Scripture. If oral tradition is Torah, it can teach the resurrection with or without recourse to Scripture. In liturgical prayer, which they confirm and institute,²⁸ the Pharisees teach the resurrection without recourse to Scripture. During prayer, they do not want to impose on the people scriptural arguments which are always debatable and which could cause difficulty for some. However, outside of prayer, they must uphold the faith and the hope in the resurrection by means of scriptural and non-scriptural argument. As for the scriptural argument, for those who ‘know the Scriptures and the power of God’, the ‘God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob’, of whom Scripture speaks, is not the God of the dead but the God of the living. Here, I am referring to the scriptural argument used by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.²⁹ It is of the same nature as those used by the sages of Israel, and which they consider to be acceptable.³⁰ The debate found in the Talmud shows that this use of scriptural texts, and therefore also the way Jesus uses a scriptural passage, is not meant to be a proof, but rather, these texts are understood to be ‘allusions’, ‘indications’. And for those who have ears to hear, it goes without saying that in matters of faith and of love, ‘allusions’ are more adequate and convincing than proofs. Let us note what Luke, the non-Jewish evangelist, remarked with precision based on Jewish testimony. He does not say, “Have you not read... (Mt 22:31; Mk 12:26)”, but: “Moses indicated it in the story about the bush... (Lk 20:37)”. This is more than just a nuance. The resurrection cannot be proven; Jewish midrash and good Christian exegesis are done in faith in order to illuminate that faith from within. The resurrection cannot be received by

²⁸ Cf. the 2nd benediction in the Amidah for every day; it is said 3 times on ordinary days, 4 times on Shabbat and feast days, 5 times on Yom Kippur. Cf. also the prayer for funerals.

²⁹ Mt 22:29-32 and parallels.

³⁰ T.B. Sanhedrin 90b. The talmudic debate comes to the conclusion that two out of the three best scriptural texts presented teach the resurrection on the basis of the promise of the Land given to the fathers in Ex 6:4 and Deut 11:21. It is this promise which Paul refers to in Acts 13:32 and 26:6. Thus we know that the Land of Israel symbolizes eternal life and points to the resurrection, not only for the Pharisees but also for Jesus (Mt 5:4) and for the first Christians. The Jews’ attachment to this Land is demanded by the Sinai covenant. Since this ‘old covenant has never been revoked’, the Jews’ link to the Land and their practice of the commandments concerning it retain, in the Christian economy, their value as a witness and their sacramental effectiveness. If Christians do not accept this, they do not understand the coherence of the oral and written Torah of Moses of which Jews live. At the same time, they undermine the whole of the coherence of all of Revelation, of which Jesus is the mediator and the fullness (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 2). I spoke of the Land in detail in my article *La Terre d’Israël, Jérusalem, le Temple, leur valeur pour les juifs et pour les chrétiens*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 1, 1996, pp. 106-140. Cf. also the article by A. Avril and E. Passeto, “Parashat Bet-Har (Lv. 25-26,2)”, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 6, 1999, pp. 98-145. This article sheds light from within on the Christian practice of Jubilee and gives a deeper insight into the wealth of Israel’s tradition on the jubilee year. (The year 5761 of the Jewish calendar, which began on September 29, 2000, was a sabbatical year.)

those who do not commit themselves to life and to the coherence of a Word of God, both oral and written, which speaks only of life and of resurrection. The coherence and perfection of the Torah do not allow one to think that there is even a single passage in the written Torah which does not teach the resurrection. But obviously, we do not have the strength to draw out this teaching by means of our exegesis.³¹ It was again Luke who best brought out the point of the pharisaic midrash that Jesus used, knowing the material (Lk 20:38): it is the experience of the God of life which lets one live for this God and beyond death. This links up with non-scriptural arguments which the sages of Israel also use.³² These texts, like that of the mother of the martyrs of Israel, point to the evidence of life which is stronger than the evidence of death.³³ Such a context, which is as dramatic as life and death, makes us understand the severity of Tradition which, in the Mishnah, threatens ‘the one who says that there is no resurrection of the dead’.³⁴ According to this Mishnah, the person who says that ‘will have no part in the world to come (in the resurrection)’. The Talmud, which is surprised by this severity and discusses it, shows clearly that the text is not talking about a condemnation, but is pronouncing a pedagogical threat.³⁵ The person who does not want life, the one who does not become involved in the community at the service of life, risks not receiving what does not interest him or her. That person has to be warned.

Working with Jewish sources is beneficial. It supports the Christian faith in the resurrection, and it allows one to understand the literary genre of pedagogical threats which are frequent in the teaching of Jesus, for example in Mk 16:15-16. These ‘threats’, when badly interpreted in a fundamentalist ignorance of their Jewish context, were and still are able to damage certain Christians; here and there, they can still bring Christian preaching into disrepute.

The to and fro on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is obviously central to the Christian faith, also allows us to note that the resurrection is not of such central importance for Jews. As a result, the fundamental link which exists between the oral Torah and the resurrection can possibly be better perceived by a Christian than by a Jew. Could the Christian witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, illumined from within by the Tradition of Israel, stimulate better reflection on the part of Jews concerning the resurrection, which they proclaim in their prayer at least three times a day?

³¹ Cf. Rabbi Simai in Sifre on Deut 32:2, p. 341. Cf. also my article, *L'exégèse (midrash) de la Tradition d'Israël, sa grandeur et ses limites*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 5, 1998, pp. 9-43. Since Scripture (written Torah) is later than and interior to Tradition (oral Torah), the latter determines the limits of Scripture and consequently also the limits of exegesis. But the exegesis of Tradition, the midrash, is not at all diminished by the limit it is given through its position within Tradition. Midrash is oral Torah; it has the power to manifest the unity and the divinity of the entire Torah (Tradition and Scripture). The experience of the fire and of the joy of Sinai attests to this power, very especially when the exegete succeeds in putting together a good ‘necklace’ with the pearls of Scripture. This is what Jesus does in Lk 24:27.44. Cf. A. Avril – P. Lenhardt, *Trois chemins: Emmaüs, Gaza et Damas*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 4, 1998, pp. 11-56.

³² T.B. Sanhedrin 90b-91a.

³³ 2 Macc 7:22-23,28-29

³⁴ Mishnah Sanhedrin 10,1.

³⁵ T.B. Sanhedrin 90a.

The One and Unique God³⁶

As a Christian and according to the Apostolic Creed, I say: “I believe in God... and in Jesus Christ... I believe in the Holy Spirit”. According to the Nicene Creed, I say: “I believe in one God... I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ... I believe in the Holy Spirit...”. Taken by themselves, these expressions of faith do not clearly teach either monotheism or, even less, the Unity of God. In spite of surprising shifts in vocabulary, the catechisms and the theologians state clearly that for Christians, God is One and Unique, in three persons. There is often a wavering between the One God and the Unique God or between the Unity of God and God’s Uniqueness. In spite of these difficulties, faith is finally expressed in the One and Unique God, who is the most real of all realities to which Judaism and Christianity bear witness. For Christianity, it is good that the Unity and Uniqueness of God are clearly taught by Jesus and by a scribe, according to the Gospel of Mark, in response to the question concerning the first of all the commandments (Mk 12:28-34). In this discussion, Jesus bases his reply on the beginning of the ‘reading of the Shema (Israel)’: “*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love... (Deut 6:4-5)*”. As for the scribe, he approves of Jesus and says: “*You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’*”. The Greek of the New Testament and the Latin of the Vulgate have the word One (eis, unus) and not Unique (monos, unicus). The same is true of the Greek and Latin of Deut 6:4. The scribe explains very well what Jesus said: God is One, God is Unique because there is no other god who is One as He is.³⁷ Thus, we have to do here with the ineffable Unity of God, which the Jews must proclaim and which the Christians, united with Jesus Christ, must make known in the world (Jn 17:3,11,21-22). This is what we should be able to say very simply, if only we didn’t have to overcome erroneous translations of Mk 12:29 and 12:32 both in French (Bible de Jérusalem and T.O.B.) and in English (The Jerusalem Bible) and in German (Württembergische Bibelanstalt, Stuttgart). Such translations, which speak only of the Uniqueness of God and which seem to be unaware of the fact that the text is speaking first and foremost about God’s Unity, show that their authors give no importance to the Jewish sources of the New Testament. The impoverishment of the message of Jesus, of which these translators are guilty, is even more serious than their ignorance. At the time of the New Testament, teaching on the Uniqueness of God was certainly necessary, as it is at every time because of the permanent danger of idolatry. But the Shema Israel, which had become an established reading for the evening and morning prayer of every Jew, taught above all the Unity of God, the principle of unification out of love. The blessings which surround the reading of the Shema, and especially the one which immediately precedes it, teach the Unity of God and the duty of unification. The rabbinic interpretations of Deut 6:4-5 teach the same, as is magnificently illustrated

³⁶ I have spoken about the One and Unique God in every one of my articles, and I dealt with this topic in various courses and conferences in different places. In a recent article, I presented the message and the program of Unification which the Tradition of Israel (oral Torah) practices in the liturgy of the synagogue. Cf. P. Lenhardt, *La liturgie d’Israël à l’origine de la liturgie chrétienne – L’oralité enseignante* in *La Prière Liturgique, Conférence Saint-Serge, XLVIIème Semaine d’Etudes Liturgiques*, Paris, June 27-30, 2000, Rome, Edizioni Liturgiche, 2001, pp. 55-90.

³⁷ A scribe does not speak without saying anything. Independently of the respect we owe the Greek, it would be inept to have the scribe say the same thing twice, for example: ‘He is unique and there is no other’ (Mk 12:32, French Jerusalem Bible).

by Rabbi Akiba, who died the death of a martyr of love while saying the word “One (ehad)” of the Shema Israel.³⁸

But of course we have to do more than just avoid errors. We must teach Unity. The best among the Jews merit being called ‘Seekers of the Unity (Dorshei ha-Yihud)’. Following the Jewish example and in response to the call of Jesus Christ, the Christian life should be a search for and imitation of the One God. Christians should be ‘Seekers of the Unity-Trinity’, and one result of that search should be the Unity of Christians. This result can only be reached in contact with Israel and with the Jewish sources. The Church’s credibility in interfaith dialogue depends on the intensity of this contact. The Christian witness to God must be based on the witness of Israel, heard and received at the heart of the Church.

The Absent and the Present God – The Paradox of Revelation and Incarnation³⁹

The Unity of God is mysterious, ineffable; nevertheless, it must be proclaimed. It is paradoxical: God is One, indivisible, and yet God wants to be proclaimed on the one hand as absent, hidden, unknown, and on the other hand, as present, revealed and known. God is Unique; so it is God Himself and no other who is absent and present. God is always the same when He makes Himself present in the world at different times, in different places, with various appearances. It is because God is hidden that God saves and is believable.⁴⁰ If ‘belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith’, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us (no. 463), a Christian must acknowledge with the Fathers of the Church that the Incarnation is the ‘paradox of paradoxes’.⁴¹ An experience as fundamental as this one cannot not exist at the root of the Christian faith, in the Tradition of Israel. Thus, we are forced to enter into the analytical process. But its points of departure in the Church’s liturgy and in the New Testament do not lead us immediately to the places where the Tradition of Israel can open up its treasures to those who are seeking them. In any case, it was the synthetic process, the study of Jewish sources, which let me see better the depth of the paradox of revelation and Incarnation.

Jewish liturgy with its multiple proclamations of the Holiness of God gives us the most simple, most captivating and most luminous expression of the paradox. All the Kedushot (plural of Kedushah = Holiness), all the liturgical proclamations of the Holiness of God are based explicitly on Scripture, which transmits what was communicated to Isaiah of the seraphim’s heavenly liturgy (Isa 6:4): “*Holy (Kadosh), Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; his Glory (Kabod) fills the whole earth!*”

³⁸ T.B. Berakhot 61b.

³⁹ Here, I am going back to my article, *La Tradition d’Israël sur la Présence Divine (Shekinah) dans le Temple et dans le monde éclairé la foi chrétienne en l’Incarnation*, Cahiers Ratisbonne no. 2, 1997, pp. 136-161.

⁴⁰ Cf. Isa 45:14-15, of which Pascal speaks magnificently in *Opuscules*, Third Part, IV 2, Ed. Brunschvicg, Hachette, Paris, 1968, pp. 214-215; *Pensées*, Ed. Brunschvicg, nos. 194, 242, 585. Cf. also the beautiful study by J. Briand, ‘Le Dieu caché’ in *Dieu dans l’Ecriture*, Cerf, Paris, 1992, pp. 91-112.

⁴¹ Cf. H. de Lubac, *Paradoxes*, followed by *Nouveaux Paradoxes*, Seuil, Paris, 1959. H. de Lubac borrows the formula ‘paradox of paradoxes’ from the Church Fathers and places it as a heading for his entire book.

Immediately after comes the complement which the liturgy wants to add to the proclamation of the seraphim. This is spoken by the living creatures whom Ezekiel heard (Ezek 3:12): “*Blessed is the Glory (Kabod) of the Lord, from His Place (mi-mekomo)!*”. The text of the prayer which joins these two citations and the Talmud render the message loud and clear:⁴² the immanent Glory, which is present and known in the place of the Temple (and of the community which joins its earthly liturgy to the heavenly liturgy), points towards its transcendent origin, towards the hidden and absent God, towards the unknown God who manifests Himself (starting) *from His Place (mi-mekomo)* which is unknown. In all its forms, the liturgy of the Church has always declared its link with the heavenly liturgy and the proclamation of the seraphim (Isa 6:3). The Church did not retain and maybe did not valorize the pedagogical complement added by the living creatures in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 3:12). One single trace of that complement can be found in the prayer that is preserved in the ‘Apostolic Constitutions’.⁴³ The Eucharistic prayer of the Church of Jerusalem does not have this addition, and this would seem to indicate that even where the Church might have felt the closest to Israel, it felt detached from the Jewish sources already in the year 386, *terminus ad quem* of the 5th mystagogical catechesis of Cyrill of Jerusalem, who knew the liturgy of St. James.⁴⁴

Today, it is indispensable that we listen to the message of the Jewish sources in all its fullness. Starting with the Glory of which the Bible speaks, we must find again all the biblical and rabbinic traditions on the Shekhinah, on God’s will to live in the world, on God’s action in living in the world and on the result of that action, on the Presence of God in the world. God is present everywhere in his world by his ‘ongoing creation’ that is taught in the liturgical prayer of Israel,⁴⁵ by Jewish and Christian theologians, and recently also by the constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁶ This presence of the creator God in every part of his creation was strongly affirmed by Rabban Gamaliel, the grandson of Gamaliel, who was the teacher of Saint Paul. He said: “No place on earth is empty of the Shekhinah.”⁴⁷ But God, who loves Israel and all humankind, wants to dwell by his Shekhinah in all places and at every moment, wherever and whenever He wants to be met by men and women in order to speak with them and to save them: by Moses in the Burning Bush (Ex 3); by Israel in Egypt during the night of the Passover (Ex 12), while crossing the Red Sea (Ex 14 and 15), in the gift of the Torah on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:10; Deut 5:24), in the Tent of Meeting (Ex 25:8,22; Lev 1:1; 16:1,16), in the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:10-13; Isa 6:3; Ezek 3:12); by each community and each person who calls upon God’s Name

⁴² The most explicit linking text is in *Kedushah Rabbah*, 3rd benediction of the Additional Prayer for the Sabbath and feasts; the Talmud, T.B. Hagigah 13b, simply says (Ezek 3:12): “*From his place*”, we conclude that that place is unknown’.

⁴³ Book VII 35, 3, S.C.N. 336, Cerf, Paris, 1987, p. 77.

⁴⁴ André Tarby, *La prière eucharistique de l’Eglise de Jérusalem*, l’anaphore grecque de Saint Jacques de Jérusalem, Beauchesne, Paris, 1972, pp. 49-55. Here, I would like to point out that Saint John Chrysostom knew of the addition brought by Ezek 3:12 to Isa 6:3. Cf. *Sur l’incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, Homily I, 3092-320, S.C. 28 bis, Cerf, Paris, 1970, pp. 127-129. Although the message given by this complementarity remains valid and relevant in the Christian economy, it seems to remain unknown. Cf. for example F. Peterson, *Le livre des anges*, Ad Solem, Genève, 1996 (1935), pp. 55-56; cf. also L. Bouyer, *La vie de la liturgie*, Cerf, Paris, 1956, pp. 170-173.

⁴⁵ Cf. the blessing ‘Yotser’ which precedes the ‘reading of the Shema’ in the morning.

⁴⁶ *Dei Verbum* 3; H. de Lubac comments magnificently on this point in *La Révélation Divine*, Cerf, Paris, 1983, pp. 63-69.

⁴⁷ Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, Pisk. I, p. 4.

(Ex 20:24).⁴⁸ The Shekhinah manifests itself in various appearances, but those who see it recognize that it is always the same God, the God of Israel, One and Unique, who is revealing Himself.⁴⁹ No appearance of the Shekhinah ‘diminishes’ another appearance. Indeed, God does not divide Himself, nor does He give Himself sparingly or in dribs and drabs. But it is possible that the Shekhinah is ‘less effective’ if Israel is not worthy of its action. It seems that this was the case for the Shekhinah in the Second Temple.⁵⁰ The ineffectiveness came from Israel, from ‘the evil generation’ (Mt 12:39), which was unable to ‘interpret the signs of the times’ (Mt 16:3), from the ‘generation which does not deserve’ that the Shekhinah, or the Holy Spirit, rest on it.⁵¹ Such a situation corresponds with the end of the 2nd Temple period, which was judged just as harshly by the pharisaic teachers as by Jesus in the Gospels.⁵² But the Shekhinah’s diminished effectiveness is not its absence. It is not possible to argue from a tradition affirming such an absence.⁵³ This tradition bears no weight compared to the evidence coming out of the liturgy of the 2nd Temple until its destruction: sacrifices, pilgrimage feasts, the service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur (Seder Avodah) which is acted out again today in the liturgy of the synagogue. To this, we must add the evidence found in the New Testament starting with the words and gestures of Jesus having to do with the Temple. These words and gestures bear witness to the fact that Jesus presented himself as being the Shekhinah and that he was understood to be the Shekhinah. This can explain the conflict which put Jesus in opposition to certain Jewish authorities of his time, a conflict which must have gone even so far as to cause Jesus to be accused of blasphemy. It is because the Shekhinah was in the Temple that Jesus declares himself to be ‘greater than the Temple’, thus saying that as Shekhinah he is, in fact, greater than the Temple where the Shekhinah resides (Mt 12:6). We see that the Christian faith in the Incarnation, based on the Church’s Tradition and on the New Testament, is supported by the teaching of the Tradition of Israel on the paradox of revelation and on the Shekhinah, which is known, and which reveals the unknown God. Conversely, the Tradition of Israel – for which the Shekhinah was in the 2nd Temple and which, since the destruction of the Temple, asks in prayer for the Shekhinah’s return to Zion – receives striking confirmation from the Christian faith and from the New Testament. Seen from the Christian point of view, the coherence of the Torah of the One God illumines with one single light both the Jewish and the Christian message on the Shekhinah which is present to suffering in the Burning Bush, which is redemptive at Passover, and which teaches at Sinai. At the same time, this coherence causes the Holy Spirit to break forth; this Spirit, which is inseparable from the Shekhinah, lets people recognize the Shekhinah while at the same time proceeding from it (1 Cor 12:3). Seen in terms of continuity, what is new in Christianity – and this is, of course, irreducible – is that Christians see and proclaim that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the Lord, whom no one can profess unless by the Holy Spirit, is the Shekhinah.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 20:24, p. 243 and Rashi ad locum; Mishnah Avot 3,2,6; T.B. Berakhot 6a.

⁴⁹ Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 15:2, “*This One is my God*”, pp. 126-127; T.B. Sotah 30b; Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 20:2, pp. 219-220.

⁵⁰ T.B. Yoma 21b, Tosafot on we-urim we-tummim.

⁵¹ T.B. Sanhedrin 11a; Tosefta Sota 13,3-4, p. 231.

⁵² Cf. T.B. Yoma 9b on ‘gratuitous hatred’ between Jews.

⁵³ T.B. Yoma 9b-10a; 21b; Rashi on Gen 9:27.

⁵⁴ Cf. two experiences of the Holy Spirit, in the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 15:1, pp. 118-119 and in 1 Cor 12:3, which for a Christian shed light on one another.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Shekhinah, thus affirming and illuminating all the past and future manifestations of the Shekhinah in the world. He is also, inseparably, the incarnate Word of the Father. The Jewish sources continue to nourish deeply the Christian faith in the Incarnation.

The Oral Torah and the Incarnate Torah⁵⁵

Among many other possibilities, Israel defines itself as the people of ‘servants of the Lord and no longer slaves of Pharaoh’,⁵⁶ or also as the ‘servant’ of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks⁵⁷ and about whom the Mishnah transmits: ‘Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashia (beginning of the 2nd century C.E.) says: “The Holy One, blessed be He!, wanted Israel to merit. This is why He multiplied for them Torah and commandments, as it is said (Isa 42:21): “The Lord was pleased, for the sake of his righteousness, to *magnify his Torah and make it glorious*.”⁵⁸ The Torah is given to Israel so that it will magnify it and make it glorious through study-teaching (Talmud Torah) and through action (commandments). This development and this illumination do not happen through the written Torah, which is fixed and unchangeable, but through the oral Torah, which has been confided to living persons and communities. It is through the people that the Torah is ceaselessly renewed. Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, the most conservative masters, who guaranteed the continuity of the Torah before and after the destruction of the 2nd Temple, could not imagine that there could ever be even one day without ‘renewal (hiddush)’ in the ‘house of study’.⁵⁹ The oral Torah is lived and transmitted in the relationship teacher-disciple in which every person can be the teacher: father, mother, the smallest in Israel and the greatest.⁶⁰ It is beyond doubt that a great teacher like Rabbi Eliezer, although a sinner, is a living Torah for his disciples.⁶¹ The disciple receives as Torah not only what the master teaches through his words, but also what he teaches through his actions.⁶² However, no early master ever said of himself nor did anyone else ever say of an early master that he was the Torah. Nevertheless, in the different hassidic currents that came forth from Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), we can see the status of the ‘Zaddik’, the head of the community according to the different dynasties, being elevated to

⁵⁵ This last part of my discourse is what is closest to my heart and in saying it, I have to risk appearing to be simplistic, naïve or arrogant. I am sorry not to be able to explain better what I want to say now in conclusion. I did not have the time to consult the friends who encouraged me to write these lines. If God wills, I will correct and complete what I am writing today and will take into account their reflection and their work which have already been a great help to me.

⁵⁶ T.J. Pesahim 5,5, 32c, cf. footnote 24.

⁵⁷ Isa 41:8-9; 42:1,19; 43:10; 44:1-2,21; 49:3.

⁵⁸ Mishnah Makkot 3,16. It is reasonable to think that ‘his righteousness’ aims at the righteousness of the ‘servant’ (Israel).

⁵⁹ Mishnah Yadayim 4,3; T.B. Hagigah 3a.

⁶⁰ Sifre on Deut 11:13, p. 86. Cf. in addition Rashi (1040-1105) on T.B. Shabbat 105b, le-sefer-torah she-nisraf: ‘The person who sees a book of the Torah destroyed by fire must tear (his garment)... You must do the same when a soul in Israel is taken away (by death), because there is no one in Israel who is empty of Torah and of commandments.’ It is through the relationship teacher-disciple that the continuity of the Torah is maintained. Cf. my article, *Voies de la continuité juive – Aspects de la relation maître-disciple d’après la littérature rabbinique ancienne*, Recherches de Science religieuse, 66/4 (1978), pp. 489-511.

⁶¹ T.B. Sanhedrin 101a-b; cf. also what Rabbi Eliezer said about himself in T.B. Sanhedrin 68a.

⁶² T.B. Berakhot 62a; cf. also *Sefat Emet* (Rabbi Yehudah Arie Leib Alter of Ger, 1847-1905), Shavuot, 4 23: ‘the action of the Righteous is Torah’.

such a degree that some already speak of a ‘living incarnation of the Torah’. This does not happen without causing concern to certain learned Jews.⁶³ Rav Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1811), the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, reached an extreme point when he said of the ‘Righteous One (Zaddik) of the generation’, while thinking of himself: “When one speaks of the oral Torah or when one speaks of the Righteous One of the generation himself, one is speaking of one and the same thing, for the essential of the oral Torah depends on the righteous one of the generation... And surely the Disciple of the Sage is in himself the Torah... (ha-talmid hakam hu be-atsmo ha-torah).”⁶⁴ Rav Nathan of Nemirov (1780-1845), a disciple of Rav Nahman, said of his teacher: ‘His intention (Rav Nahman’s) is that we receive his holy words in simplicity in such a way that we observe and do and accomplish all the words of his Torah with simplicity and perfection (absence of division).’⁶⁵ This application to Rav Nahman of phrases which apply to God in liturgical prayer, in the 2nd blessing before the Shema Israel in the morning, goes very far. It is possible that the Hassidim of Bratslav go even further in their attachment to Rav Nahman without talking about it outside of their communities.⁶⁶ Obviously, I cannot argue on the basis of these hassidic realities in order to justify what I expressed when I said: Jesus Christ, in His Person, is the Torah. Nevertheless, I do admit that this way of putting it was suggested to me by what Rav Nahman said: The Disciple of the Sage is in himself the Torah.

Thus, I do not want to justify that phrase, but rather to suggest it as being preferable to others. One could think of the simpler phrase: Jesus Christ is the Torah. But that would result in two difficulties: the first is that neither the word ‘Torah’ nor the word ‘Word of God’ appear in the Symbols of faith; the second difficulty is that the word Torah would be imprecise.

Let us talk about the first difficulty first. Jesus Christ, whom I name in the phrase, is the Jesus Christ of Christian faith, the one of whom the Nicene Creed says: ‘He came down from heaven... He became man of the Virgin Mary.’ On the other hand, I see how the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks about Incarnation: ‘Taking up St. John’s expression, “The Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14), the Church calls “Incarnation” the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it.’⁶⁷ From this, it follows that the Jesus Christ of Christian faith is the incarnate Word of God, the incarnate Torah. Thus, I have the right to attribute the Torah to Jesus Christ. But strictly speaking, we are talking about the incarnate Torah. Do I have the right to identify the incarnate Torah with just Torah? This is the second difficulty I already indicated.

The second difficulty follows from the fact that the two phrases, ‘Torah’ and ‘incarnate Torah’ are not exactly equivalent. If without doubt Jesus Christ is in fact the incarnate Word or the incarnate Torah, he is not necessarily the Torah which is perhaps, or which is certainly larger than the incarnate Torah. Do we therefore have

⁶³ Cf. S. Schechter, *The Chasidim*, in *Studies in Judaism*, First Series, Philadelphia, 1945, pp. 1-45; G. Sholem, *Les grand courants...*, pp. 362-364; *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, 1946, p. 344; S.H. Dresner, *The Zaddik*, New York, 1974, p. 123 and p. 277, footnote 26.

⁶⁴ *Liqutey Moharan* I nos. 207, 112d.

⁶⁵ *Sihot ha-Ran*, no. 131.

⁶⁶ The ‘secret’ (sod) and the practice of what is secret are upheld in the Bratslav tradition. Cf. M. Piekarz, *Studies in Bratslav Hasidism* (in Hebrew), Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 1972, pp. 10-16.

⁶⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 461.

to forego speaking of the ‘Word’ and talk rather of the ‘Son’? This would have the advantage of being the language of the symbols of faith. We would thus have: ‘Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man, is the incarnate Torah.’ But this phrase remains difficult because it does not shed light on the link that exists between the Son of God and the Torah (incarnate or not).

Taking into account the difficulties on both sides, I come back to the phrase: ‘Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, is the Torah.’ What remains a problem is the difficulty resulting from the imprecision of the word Torah: incarnate Torah and/or not incarnate Torah?

To get out of this impasse, I would suggest first of all: ‘Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, is in himself (be-at-smo) the Torah’. In this, I draw my inspiration from what Rav Nahman of Bratslav said: ‘The Disciple of the Sage is in himself (be-at-smo) the Torah’. I don’t know exactly what Rav Nahman meant by ‘in himself (be-at-smo)’. I think it could mean: ‘at the deepest point of his being’. With an obvious Christian intention, I am taking his phrase and modifying it somewhat. I understand ‘in himself’ as being equivalent to ‘in his person’, and I would thus suggest: Jesus, in His Person (as Son of the Father), is the Torah. He is certainly the incarnate Torah, the limited Torah, but this Torah is one with the unlimited Torah which in God precedes the creation of the world and which proceeds to that creation. We have come back to the paradox of revelation, the paradox of the Shekhinah, which in presence lets us know absence. The person of Jesus Christ is the abyss of the depth where the Torah is at one and the same time, at the same moment and in the same place, limited and unlimited. Jesus Christ is the unlimited Word which, out of love, limited or ‘abbreviated’ itself.⁶⁸ According to all the pharisaic masters, God limited Himself in giving His Torah to Israel ‘in human language’. According to Rabbi Ishmael, God went even further; God limited Himself in speaking, in the Torah, ‘according to human language’.⁶⁹ This vision of the Torah is at the root of the Christian faith in the Incarnation. In the humanity of Jesus, the incarnate Word, the Torah is limited to the limits of the human intelligence, will and memory of Jesus. But it is through and in his limited, weak, debased, humiliated, crucified humanity that he is exalted above everything and that he accomplishes the salvation of the world.⁷⁰ Just as in his Person these limitations open onto universal salvation, so they are themselves open and open onto the unlimited Torah. Such a passage from the limited Torah to the unlimited Torah happens in every Jew, for each person in Israel received a voice and a light from Sinai which are a voice and a light of the Torah.⁷¹ This passage happens *a fortiori* in the Person of Jesus Christ, ‘the Son of God, true God from true God’. Through his own limitation, he increases the value of the limited Torah in each person. Through his own limitation, he gives each person access to the unlimited Torah. In union with the person of Jesus, each Christian, from the moment of his or her baptism and in the Eucharist, can become Torah with Jesus, in His Person.

May I believe that this Christian conviction sheds light on the Jews’ attachment to the Torah, which for them is attachment to the masters and ultimately attachment to God? My response is yes: even as the Jews teach me how far, according to them, the

⁶⁸ Cf. footnote 19.

⁶⁹ Sifre on Num 15:31, p. 131.

⁷⁰ Cf. Phil 2:6-11 and Catechism... no. 461.

⁷¹ Cf. the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 20:18, p. 235 and Rashi as cited in footnote 60.

attachment to the masters and to the Torah can go, so the Christian can teach how far his or her own attachment goes.⁷² The Christian can tell Rav Nahman: “It is possible that you consider yourself to be in yourself Torah. It is possible for you to say that because a certain contact with Christians and a certain knowledge of the New Testament gave you that idea.⁷³ But I think it is more likely that you are saying that because you live it in truth: in yourself, in your limited humanity is the unlimited Torah. What you live, we Christians say that Jesus lives in his person. What you live, you receive from the Shekhinah which is in you, because the Holy Spirit is upon you. What we Christians live, we receive from the Son of God who is the Shekhinah and the Torah.

The leap of Christian faith, in the line of continuity, consists in seeing in **Jesus Christ** himself, in **His Person, the Shekhinah and the Torah**. Through his Incarnation, the Son of God gives to each person, through faith, the means to be united with Him, the possibility of becoming in Him ‘son in the Son’. He gives to each person in him/herself, to each person in their own person united with His Person, the possibility of becoming not only a living Torah, but the Torah. In Judaism, the community, the solidarity between persons and generations is very highly valued. If the Christian faith is the gift of God which makes of Christians sons and daughters in the Son, it carries enough light to let us see what Jews experience when they are busy with the Torah. Christianity receives from Jews the witness to ‘the joy of the Torah (simhah shel Torah)’. Resonating with the Jews’ joy of the Torah, Christians rejoice in living the joy of the Holy Spirit, who lets us know Jesus Christ as Lord and Son of the Father who sent him (1 Cor 12:3; Jn. 17:3).

⁷² An anonymous tradition, which probably goes further back than the destruction of the 2nd Temple, teaches that to attach oneself to the Sages (of Israel) and to their disciples is to attach oneself to God. Cf. Sifre on Deut 11:22, pp. 114-115. For a Christian, to attach oneself by faith to Jesus Christ is to have eternal life (Jn 6:40-47; 11:25-26), and to see Jesus Christ is to see the Father (Jn 14:9).

⁷³ Rav Nahman spent the last year of his life (1810-1811) in Uman in the Ukraine, near Bratslav, where he met ‘maskilim’ (‘enlightened’ Jews) who read the New Testament. Cf. A. Green, *Tormented Master*, Schocken Books, New York, 1981, pp. 252-266.